

# **IDENTITIES OF EMPLOYED ETHNIC MINORITY WOMEN**

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*Dedicated to*

*my mother*  
*Gunaseeli Devadasan*

*&*

*my grandmothers*  
*Arulmoni Theophilus and Nadachi Chelliah*



## ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to consider the ways in which employed, ethnic minority women discursively construct their identities. The empirical framework within which the above study has been undertaken is discourse analysis. The women who participated in this study came from four ethnic minority groups: African, Indian, Pakistani and Chinese. The thesis begins by critically reviewing traditional theoretical frameworks such as social identity approaches, assimilation, acculturation and black identity formation theories. These theories assume identity to be a consequence of the minorities' relationship with the dominant community. Moreover the theories place too much emphasis on how ethnicity structures the lives of the women. It is therefore argued that they fail to account for the way in which ethnic minorities themselves give meaning to their identities. The present study with its emphasis on discursive construction of identities addresses these difficulties. Instead of using ethnic categorisations such as Indian, Pakistani and so on to ask participants to discuss their minority group membership, they were asked to speak about their community. This avoids assuming that ethnicity is the only way of defining minority group membership. Analysing the participants' responses it was observed that participants formulate community, community boundaries and culture in ways which reflect the changing context of society. The thesis also focuses on the participants' working lives. Again literature reviews suggest that their working lives is structured by their belonging to a minority group. Assumptions are made about how the minority culture/community and the dominant community determine the participants' lives. The analytical findings suggest that participants orient to the ways in which ethnicity is expected to structure their lives. Participants in their accounts resist these assumptions made about their lives. For example participants deny or trivialise experiences of discrimination. Participants also portray the identities of ethnic minority women as changing in contrast to the stereotypical views held by others such as 'passive', 'submissive' and so on. Accepting the participants' views poses a political problem. It suggests that structural inequalities have been overcome or is a thing of the past. It is in the participants' accounts that a solution to this problem is found. 'Commonsense Understanding' of cultural constraints, racism, continue to be maintained in the participants' accounts but as applicable to particular people and particular situations. In this way participants' accounts portray their awareness of the existence of difficulties such as racism *per se* simultaneously avoiding being limited by these difficulties.

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I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by myself, that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a degree, that the work of which it is a record has been done by myself, and that all quotations have been distinguished by either quotation marks or indentations and all sources of information have been duly acknowledged.

Sujatha P. Ross

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## INTRODUCTION

Ethnic minority women play important roles within their communities and families. In this study the terms 'ethnic minority', 'minorities' or 'black' will refer to all non-white ethnic minorities such as African, Afro-Caribbean, Asian and Chinese. The use of the terms 'dominant', 'majority' or 'white' will refer to the white British population. Within the Asian-British communities cultural traditions are passed on from mothers to daughters from the very start of a child's life (Stopes-Roe and Cochrane, 1990). Others argue that all women are 'cultural carriers' of their respective collectivities (Yuval-Davis, 1992 and Espin, 1995). Not only do ethnic minority women play important roles within their cultures, increasingly a large number of them are also participating and contributing to the wider society through employment. In Edinburgh city alone, which is the geographical focus of the present study, one-third of ethnic minority women aged over 16 are employed (1991 Census).

However we know very little about the lives of these women. There are very few studies of ethnic minority women. The dearth of studies in this area is highlighted when we consider that these few studies are part of the very few studies on minority adults as a whole. Phinney (1990) in a review of literature dealing with minority identity has pointed out that the studies on minority adults and adolescents are very limited and that majority of the studies have focused on children. Even when ethnic minority women's identities have been studied there are a number of gaps. In many studies the predominant focus has been on their belonging to an ethnic minority group. The theoretical frameworks used mainly highlight the kinds of issues faced by an ethnic minority person such as conflict between cultures or how individuals see themselves as part of two cultures. Hutnik's (1986) study of young ethnic minority women is an example. In Hutnik's study the focus is on how the young women are acculturated into the white British community and therefore the consequences to their identity. Another reason why ethnicity is given importance is



the argument that the difficulties encountered due to race supersede other difficulties facing the women. It is argued that both ethnic minority men and women suffer discrimination at the hands of white people. Therefore for black women focusing on other issues such as issues of 'male dominance' is not seen as appropriate. Opposing black men by joining with white feminists could be seen as colluding with the oppressor. Researchers such as Lorde (1994), Bhavnani and Coulson (1994) have discussed the debates surrounding these issues. They argue that as a consequence of racism black families are often the spaces for support and not sites of oppression. So while they do not discount women's oppression within black families what they are arguing is that the primary concern for the women is the difficulties they encounter as a consequence of being an ethnic minority person. Such types of accounting is also seen among third world feminists who argue that for them feminism means tackling issues affecting the third world communities as a whole. They argue that the improper distribution of resources between the developed and developing communities have to be given consideration before women's rights can be addressed. However the danger with such thinking is that it makes assumptions about how structural inequalities shape the lives of ethnic minority women or disadvantaged groups. We find that often it is the researcher who decides which of the identified difficulties are of greater significance to these groups. The further consequence of such thinking is that it overlooks how ethnic minority women or disadvantaged groups themselves view the difficulties and talk about the difficulties.

Another area within studies or reports of ethnic minority women we have difficulty with is the overemphasis on the negative or problematic aspects of the women's lives. Thus we read media reports of 'Bounty hunters tracking down Asian women escaping forced marriages' and about 'Increase in teenage pregnancies among young black women'. In the case of African-American women the focus of most studies has been on single-parenthood, matriarchal family structures, teenage

pregnancy, drug abuse, delinquency, poor performance at school and other such life-conditions, and in the case of Asian women the focus has been on arranged marriages and so on. Examples of such studies are: a study of teenage pregnancies by Scott, *et. al.* (1981), study of early motherhood by Skinner (1986). study of body image perception among women of African descent by Oforu, *et.al.* (1998). Phoenix (1994) argues that black women are usually omitted in studies understanding 'normal' women but are frequently used as the focus of research studying devalued groups. Researchers such as Parmar (1982) have critiqued such pathologising. Parmar has critiqued the kinds of cultural explanations given for the lack of participation of Asian women in employment outside their homes.

The above discussion suggests three main gaps within existing studies for an adequate understanding of the lives of ethnic minority women. First, the number of studies of ethnic minority women are limited. Second, the studies focus on ethnicity and assume that it structures the lives of the ethnic minority women in specific ways. Third, the studies mainly give attention to the negative aspects of their lives. What therefore follows is that the positive, adaptive features of these women's lives are not given visibility. This study has addressed this neglect by focusing on employed ethnic minority women and showing the ways in which women themselves account for their identities and how ethnicity structures their lives. Further, selecting ethnic minority women who are employed allows understanding the women's lives not just in relation to the minority group and its culture but also in terms of other aspects of their lives, one of which is employment.

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. Chapter 1 is a critical review of how traditional theoretical frameworks such as assimilation and acculturation approaches, social identity approaches (social identity theory and self-categorisation theory) and black identity theories have conceptualised minority identity. Highlighting the gaps in these theories we then suggest an alternate approach to understanding minority

identities. We argue that minority identities should be seen as discursively constructed and that these identities serve pragmatic purposes for the women. Chapter 2 is a description of the research design used in the study. We outline the following in this Chapter: the rationale for focusing on particular ethnic minority groups, the reasons for selecting particular interview techniques, the difficulties encountered in the research and the process of analysis.

Chapters 3 and 4 consider how the participants in this study discursively construct the importance of belonging to the minority group and being involved in the culture of their minority group. Both these aspects are said to be components of ethnic identity. Ethnic identity is the broad umbrella which includes different aspects of minority identity. So in Chapter 3 the participants construct meanings of community, who belongs to it and how others are connected to their community. We see how the 'us' and 'them' divide, which forms the basis of traditional theoretical frameworks, are worked up within the participants' accounts. The 'us' and 'them' theme continues to be addressed when the participants account for the importance of culture in Chapter 4. In Chapter 4 we consider how participants construct the meanings of aspects of culture. We discuss how other available meanings are managed in the participants' accounts and to what end. In both the chapters we also consider how participants orient to the kinds of identities made relevant for them as a consequence of belonging to a minority community or culture. Respondents are seen to resist ascription of certain identities and display ownership of others.

In Chapters 5, 6 and 7 we focus on the working lives of the participants. Previous research has argued that 'being an ethnic minority' structures the working lives of ethnic minority women. It is argued that ethnic minority women are limited by the constraints imposed on them by their culture and by the attitudes and actions of the dominant white community. In Chapter 5 we begin with a discussion of the various influences which have been pointed out by earlier studies and writers as

influencing the employment of ethnic minority women. We then proceed to consider how participants themselves account for the influences. In Chapters 6 and 7 we focus specifically on two of these influences, namely discrimination and the attitudes of their communities to working women. In Chapter 6 the participants' responses when asked to account for their experiences of discrimination at work are considered. Discrimination, particularly racial discrimination, is argued to be one of the main problems faced by ethnic minority women. It is also one of the areas which has been given a lot of attention in studies of minorities. In Chapter 6 we discuss that the participants' accounts orient to this understanding, namely discrimination as an inexplicable part of their lives. We consider how they manage such an understanding in their accounting. In Chapter 7 we consider the participants' accounts of how their communities view women working. Earlier studies have portrayed ethnic minority communities as unsupportive of working women. We identify ways by which such views are maintained and discounted. This thesis is about the identities of ethnic minority women and throughout the thesis we draw attention to the way in which participants' accounts orient to the identities which are assumed about them. In the final chapter we review the benefits of understanding the identities of ethnic minority women using discourse analysis as a method. We support this by bringing together the main themes identified in the analytic chapters. We discuss how participants' accounts reflect the changing features of British Society. We argue that it is orienting to the prevalent discourses that participants account for both group identity/membership and the implications to their personal identities. We also suggest how this differs from the traditional conceptualisations of minority identity. Simultaneously we discuss how common sense ideas about ethnic minority communities and the consequences of being an ethnic minority are produced in our participants' accounts and how this contributes to their maintenance in everyday lay discourse.



## **CHAPTER 1**

### **DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITIES**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Multiculturalism became a term of common usage in the western world after the second world war. In places such as Britain immigrant labour was solicited in jobs where the host population was unwilling to work. The increase in the number of minority group members in the western world resulted in both the host communities and the minority groups having to understand ways of living different from their own. Among the host community there was an increasing interest in the identities of the newcomers: who they were and how they fitted into their society. Both ordinary people and academics began to take note of the conflicts and problems which arose as a result of different cultures coming together. In the 1960s and 1970s various theories to understand the relationship between minority groups and the majority group were put forward within different disciplines such as sociology, social psychology, counselling and developmental psychology. Further the different theories grappled with the issue of minority identity. The theories had certain similarities and showed differences as well. In this chapter we begin with a review of some traditional theoretical frameworks which have been used by earlier studies to understand minority identity namely, assimilation, acculturation, social identity theory, particularly its extension to the study of minorities; and ethnic identity formation theory (Phinney, 1990). In addition to these theories we also discuss the self-categorisation theory put forward by Turner (1987). Self-categorisation theory or SCT is an elaboration of the social identity theory. SCT describes the processes by which individuals begin to see themselves as members of a group. The social identity theory put forward by Tajfel (1978, 1981) and self-categorisation theory of Turner are taken together and referred to as social identity approaches by researchers such as Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995).

From our discussion of the theories we identify the limitations of these

traditional theories for understanding minority identity. We then proceed to discuss an alternative approach to understanding identity. This approach views identities as discursively constructed. We argue that this approach is useful for understanding minority identities. We also provide reasons for using discourse analysis as the analytical method for understanding identities as discursively constructed.

## **ETHNIC IDENTITY - DEFINITION**

Before discussing the theoretical frameworks mentioned above it is important to define 'ethnic identity'. Minority identities have been largely discussed under the broad term ethnic identity. Defining ethnic identity is a difficult task. This is because either ethnic identity is not defined in many studies or when defined each study defines it in a different way. This has been shown to be the case by Phinney's (1990) review of articles on racial and ethnic identity in journals of psychology, sociology and allied social sciences published since 1972. According to Phinney two-thirds of the articles reviewed provide no explicit definition of ethnic identity. However when definitions were made some defined it as the psychological relationship of ethnic or racial minority group members to their own group. That is ethnic identity was defined in terms of belonging to or membership of the minority group. Others suggest that cultural aspects such as language, behaviour and values are indicators of ethnic identity. What this means is that ethnic identity is taken to mean different things by different researchers. In this context I would argue that a useful definition of ethnic identity is one which has been suggested by Blakemore and Boneham (1994). Blakemore and Boneham suggest that ethnic identity is composed of some, if not all of the following: it is associated with ideas of 'peoplehood', a homeland or land of origin, language, religion and a distinctive culture such as social norms, manners, ways of thinking, diet, dress and so on. In their view ethnic identity has many components. Having discussed what ethnic identity means we now proceed to

consider some of the theoretical approaches used to study ethnic identity.

## **ETHNIC IDENTITY - TRADITIONAL THEORETICAL APPROACHES**

The theoretical approaches discussed are: assimilation approach, acculturation approach, social identity theory, self-categorisation theory and the ethnic identity formation theories. Assimilation and acculturation approaches have been discussed within the disciplines of sociology and social psychology. Social identity theory and self-categorisation theory have been developed within social psychology, and the ethnic identity formation theories have their roots in developmental and counselling psychology (see Phinney, 1990). We now proceed to describe each theory separately in greater detail. For each theory specific criticisms will follow the description. After discussion of the various theories a brief summary of minority identity as understood by the theories will be made and common criticisms pointed out.

### **Assimilation**

The theory of assimilation assumes that immigrant communities in large plural societies would be completely absorbed into the dominant (host) community. This integration is to happen first through a process of acculturation and then through intermarriage and socialisation. Assimilation theories were possibly based on the observable social conditions of earlier periods of history namely, that invaders and the invaded, and some immigrants and the host populations in different parts of the world, have merged over a period of time. There are according to Tajfel (1981) certain immigrant groups in the United States who have been able to completely merge with the host population. Tajfel argues that even when the defining label is maintained and invoked from time to time it has lost most of the characteristics which define a minority both psychologically and socially (Tajfel, 1981: 332). Giddens (1993) describes that generations of immigrants in America were forced to

abandon their customs and practices and to mould their behaviour according to the values and norms of the majority. The assumption made by assimilation approaches is that minority group members lose their identity over time and get subsumed into the dominant culture. Thus strengthening of the dominant identity implies weakening of their own ethnic identity. However there are difficulties with understanding ethnic minority identity using the theory of assimilation. Assimilation cannot be assumed to be applicable to all situations. First, minority group members may not wish to assimilate. Second they may be prevented from assimilating by members of their own community. Third, even when assimilation seems to have happened at an externally observable level, closer interactions with the society may reveal that the merging of form does not necessarily mean that the contents have merged. Let us consider these issues one by one.

In the study of Stopes-Roe and Cochrane (1990) of Asian-British fears were expressed by parents that increased contact could lead to assimilation. They felt that contact with the white community could result in damage to '*Izzat*' or 'family honour/reputation'. Stopes-Roe and Cochrane found that '*Izzat*' was important to 94% of parents and 57% of sons and daughters. Thus any changes which affected '*Izzat*' would be resisted by the community. Wilson (1979) has suggested that '*Izzat*' is affected more by the lives and actions of women. Anwar (1979) has also discussed that values of honour and shame, identity and religion, are regarded as the prime responsibility of women. Such attitudes suggest that minority group members will resist assimilation into the dominant community. There are also examples which illustrate that minority group members can be prevented from assimilation by members of the majority group. For example Essed (1994) and Joseph (1995) have pointed out that ethnic minority women are prevented from finding employment and from attaining particular identities because of racism on the part of the dominant community. Essed's case study of a black woman real estate broker illustrates this.



According to Essed the woman had to struggle to establish herself as an entrepreneur. The woman faced racism from the city council who expected her to abide by certain conditions, when the same conditions were not expected of white male entrepreneurs. Essed points out that the woman even after setting up her business continued to find it difficult to acculturate and to be mobile within the type of business where the majority were white and male. A similar personal experience is provided by Joseph (1995) a black clinical psychologist. Her patients found it difficult to overcome issues of race and to see her as a professional. Writing about her experiences Joseph says,

....most patients and (some staff) judge me on the basis of their own racial prejudices and preconceptions, and whatever I have to offer in terms of experience and skills come a poor second. I therefore have to strive constantly to redress this imbalance - and am no longer content passively to hand over the reins of self-definition to others. (Joseph, 1995: 288)

The above are examples of individuals' experiences of resistance from the dominant community to assimilation. Other studies such as Brown (1984) have also shown that there is resistance to assimilation by measuring the attitudes of the white community. Such resistance could be at the level of preventing black people from being in situations of increased contact with the white community such as living in white neighbourhood. Brown (1984) has pointed out that some members of the white community still consider that black people should avoid living in mainly white areas. Brown (1984) and Breugal (1994) have also pointed out that black communities are excluded from the labour market, resulting in less chances for contact and assimilation. Thus it is observed that assimilation is not a straightforward process and can be prevented by a number of conditions.

A further criticism of the assimilation theory is that even when individuals assimilate and adopt customs of the dominant culture it does not imply a loss of their identity. A closer look at the so-called assimilated groups themselves will reveal the

continuing struggles of the different groups to maintain their identities. A good example of this is the Aryan invasion of India. Although the invasion occurred nearly 3000 years ago and there has been considerable intermingling of the two groups the Dravidians still continue to assert their rights. A political party called the *Dravida Munetra Khallagam*, translated as the Dravidian Forward Movement, which continues to hold its fort in Tamil Nadu (a Southern state of India), supports the interests of the Dravidians as evidenced by the anti-Hindi agitations when Hindi (a language having its roots in Sanskrit, an Aryan language) was made a compulsory language in the schools of Tamil Nadu. Similarly Stopes-Roe and Cochrane (1990) in their study of Asian-British have shown that young people, when discussing their identification with the white community and their ethnic group, coped with it in different ways. Some of them separated thought and action. For example in their study one young woman said that she was English with respect to her views and ideals but was Pakistani in the way she lived and what she did. The young people also managed being in two cultures by separating the home and the outside world, thereby not losing their culture. So for these young people adopting ways of the dominant community did not mean losing their culture. This view that there does not have to be a loss of identity has been expressed by other researchers such as Ting-Toomey (1981), Berry *et al* (1986), Hutnik (1986). These researchers have suggested a two dimensional model which argues that minority groups may choose to absorb aspects of the dominant culture without necessarily losing their own. The theoretical approach that these researchers espouse is acculturation approach.

### **Acculturation**

The term acculturation has sometimes been used synonymously with assimilation. In this study the term acculturation is not used in this sense. It is used in the way it has been formulated and understood by researchers such as Hutnik (1986) as a two-

dimensional process where the individuals can relate to both communities without weakening or losing their traditional culture. Acculturation is not about replacing one identity with another as suggested by the concept of assimilation but suggests coexistence of the two identities. Espin (1995), in her study of immigrant women in American society, shows that the women hold on to certain values of the culture to which they belong while opting for changes in others. For example, one of her participants, a young Indian woman, had persuaded her parents to let her date rather than have an arranged marriage for her, but said that she would only date an Indian boy. Similarly in Woollett *et. al.*'s (1994) study, Asian-British women gave examples of how they maintained tradition in some ways and changed in other ways. Change was expressed in terms of clothing and food and in the ways of thinking. For example in an extract quoted by Woollett *et. al.* (1994:125) one woman said:

I think we are more like the Indians, although our children like to live like the English. I think Indian because of our dress. Not food because we eat everything..... We have had to become like this because we're living in this country.

Thus the concept of acculturation allows individuals to have a relationship with their ethnic group as well as with the dominant group. Also the two relationships may be independent. Thus minority group individuals may have strong or weak identifications with both their own and the dominant culture. This allows minority individuals the freedom to maintain, explore, rediscover or reject their ethnic identity (Hutnik, 1986). The idea that individuals can have different relationships with their ethnic group and the dominant group has led researchers to suggest that they can be categorised in four ways. Thus according to Hutnik (1986) apart from acculturation, individuals may be categorised as assimilative, dissociative and marginal. Assimilative individuals see themselves as belonging exclusively to the majority group and not to the minority group. Dissociative individuals see themselves as belonging exclusively to their minority group and not to the majority group, and

marginal individuals see themselves as identifying with neither group. Conceptually acculturation seems to be more acceptable since it offers the flexibility that individuals or communities can engage with the dominant community to a greater or a lesser extent. However there are difficulties with this theory also.

There are problems with the way in which the theory has been used in empirical studies. Acculturation has increasingly been understood in terms of the extent to which individuals change from being traditional to being western with respect to cultural symbols and practices, namely food, clothing, language, western attitudes to marriage and so on. Thus it is suggested that immigrant young women adopting western attitudes to sexual freedom, adopting western styles of dressing, eating western cuisine are the indicators or signs of acculturation (Espin, 1995). However Hutnik has shown the inadequacy of empirically studying acculturation in terms of the extent to which individuals adopt the customs of the dominant group. In her study of adolescent ethnic minority girls a number of individuals identified themselves as both British and Indian (acculturative identification) but only 50% of the girls showed acculturative behaviour. Hutnik argues that ethnic identity may be partially autonomous of the individuals' mode of social adaptation (adopting the customs of the dominant group). It could be argued that this difficulty could be overcome by distinguishing between identification and behaviour or by using other measures. However there are difficulties even if identification is considered separately on its own.

Hutnik (1986) in her study asked young ethnic minority girls to identify themselves as Indian, Indian and British and British to establish ethnic identification. The basis on which ethnic identity was assessed in this study was ethnicity, in particular Indian. Hutnik argues that nationality was selected as important to South Asians on the basis of an earlier study by her. But her study included 91.3 per cent of women who were of Indian extraction, 3.9 per cent from mixed backgrounds, 2.9



per cent East African Indians and one young woman from Pakistan. There is a potential difficulty with the way in which Hutnik has assumed that all of them see the nationality *Indian* as having some meaning and therefore affiliate with it or reject it. What is being argued is that although the women have an Indian origin they may not relate to the nationality Indian in similar ways, particularly in the case of those individuals for whom migration to Britain is a second migration. The difficulty is further compounded if the religious affiliation of Hutnik's sample is considered. The sample includes 60.2 per cent Sikhs, 26.2 per cent Hindus, 1.9 per cent Muslim, and 11.6 per cent who did not answer the question about religion. The political situation in India is such that there are a large number of Sikhs who do not consider themselves Indian. In India Sikhs have been fighting for a number of years to have a separate state and so they do not actually see themselves as belonging to India. The point here is that the researcher's assumptions that particular categories have equal relevance to all individuals is problematic. Criticisms have been also raised by poststructuralists such as Bhavnani and Haraway (1994) who argue against viewing categories as homogenous.

Moreover Hutnik also indicates only three ways in which the individuals can make their ethnic identification, namely, Indian, British, Indian and British. If the girls did not identify with one of the above ways then it was indicated that they did not belong to any category. They were treated as marginal individuals who did not have affiliation to any of the above categories. But women may choose not to make an identification for reasons other than that of belonging to a particular category. For example Allen (1994) points out that people in Northern Ireland do not identify themselves in terms of religion because it could carry social and personal costs. Thus according to her silence cannot be taken as indicative of lack of identification. That individuals' responses are influenced by the context in which they are being made is not taken into consideration. Woollett *et. al.* have argued from the findings

of their study of Asian British women that studies of acculturation should take into account the context. They suggest specifically that studies should address that different life stages influence the kinds of identification made by individuals.

The importance of addressing contextual issues is also highlighted by other studies such as that of Espin (1984). Espin's argument is that sometimes the social context in which the women live does not encourage acculturation. Espin (1984) points out that for immigrant women and their parents in the USA 'becoming Americanised' becomes equated with becoming sexually promiscuous. So for these women acculturation is resisted by the communities. Resistance can also come from the dominant communities. Thus acculturation may not be possible for all women. The above discussion suggests that taking the categorisation made by the woman as representing her state of ethnic identity or the individual's ethnic identification at a given time is therefore too simplistic. The discussion also highlights a further point, namely that acculturation does not explain why individuals identify or do not identify with particular categories. Social identity theory provides some explanation as to why minorities possess particular identities. However our discussion of the theory points out the problems with the explanation provided.

### **Social identity approaches**

The next set of theories, namely social identity approaches, *Theories based on social identity*, particularly the way it has been extended to understand minorities, attempt to understand how the social groups without completely assimilating stand in relation to each other. Social identity approaches discuss the psychological consequences of such relationships both at group and individual levels. These approaches further discuss how new social identities are developed for the group and for the group members. Social identity theory discusses how the question of minorities is tied up with the social position of the different groups and the context of discrimination.

Moreover social identity theory's extension to understanding minorities also comes at a time when minorities are not content with the status quo situation of power positions. It therefore attempts to explain the way in which minorities challenge the status quo.

### ***Social Identity Theory***

According to Phinney (1990) much research on ethnic identity has been conducted within Tajfel's (1978,1981) social identity theory and its extension to understand minorities. Tajfel defines social identity as that derived from group memberships together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership. Tajfel also suggests that it is important for this social identity to be positive, given the investment of the individual in the group and the implications for self-esteem. He suggests that positive social identity of individuals and therefore self-esteem depends on the positive identity of the group. Moreover positive identity or group status is always relative to other groups. In real life situations groups are in power relations to each other. As Hogg and Abrams (1988:26-27) point out the dominant group has the material power to maintain particular identities for itself. The dominant group imposes its value system on society which is constructed to benefit itself and to legitimate and perpetuate its dominant status. In cases where the status of the dominant group is not accepted it achieves a positive identity by discriminating in favour of itself. However minority group membership confers on its members an evaluatively negative social identity and lowered self-esteem. Thus discrimination leaves the minority group feeling psychologically inferior. The minority group members thus have an identity which is unsatisfactory. When this happens the individuals are pressurised to try and achieve a positive or satisfactory identity for themselves.

Tajfel defines the strategies used by individuals to achieve a positive identity

as strategies of social change. Individuals may use either individual or group strategies. The strategies used by individuals depend on the perceived permeability of the group boundaries and the perceived legitimacy of the situation (see also Hogg and Abrams, 1988). If individuals possess a social mobility belief system and believe that intergroup boundaries are permeable, they will leave their group to join another group which can offer them a more satisfactory identity. When conditions are permeable individuals will use this strategy irrespective of whether they see their position as legitimate or illegitimate. When individual mobility is denied, or if group boundaries are perceived to be impermeable, members belonging to minority groups hold social change beliefs. These individuals adopt group strategies. The group strategy they adopt depends on whether they view the intergroup situation as legitimate or illegitimate. If the situation is assumed to be legitimate the group follows strategies such as assimilation and social creativity. *Assimilation* is a process where the positive features of the high status group are adopted by the low status group. *Social creativity* is a process whereby the low status group redefines some of the negative characteristics of the group positively. The slogan, 'Black is Beautiful' of the Black Consciousness raising movement in the 1960s is a good example. According to Tajfel (1981) social creativity strategies used by minorities are of two forms. The first is to re-evaluate existing group characteristics which carry an unfavourable connotation as given by the above example of Black is Beautiful. The second strategy is to search past culture for old traditions or separate attributes, which are then given new and positive significance. For example, the re-establishment of equal or high status for the separate language of ethnic minorities.

Sometimes members of the minority group may perceive that the group boundaries are impermeable and illegitimate. In such circumstances individuals may use a strategy of social competition. Here group members challenge the dominant group and seek to change the relative power and status of their group. The American



civil rights movement is an example.

Social identity theory is attractive because it has been applied to real intergroup situations. It suggests reasons as to why individuals want to change their identity. It describes how social groups stand in certain power- and status-relations to one another, and that this structure has implications for identity-formation and change. But there are also a number of criticisms which have been raised against social identity theory and the way in which it has been applied to minorities.

Social identity theory assumes that minority groups feel inferior or possess a negative identity in comparison with the dominant group. It is because of this inferiority that individuals attempt to use the different strategies outlined by Tajfel to bring about change in their situation. One of the difficulties with using 'low self-esteem' as the starting point has to do with the way in which this concept of low-self esteem for minority adults has been arrived at. The idea of low self-esteem among black or ethnic minority groups has been established on the basis of studies done on black children aged 3-10 years. According to Robinson (1995) the empirical studies with young children, mostly around their choices and reactions to black and white dolls, have been particularly influential in promoting the view that black identity implies self-hatred. A large percentage of the studies found that the children showed preferences to the white dolls and rejected the black dolls. The white-preference behaviour was then interpreted as evidence of self-rejection and low self-esteem in black children. The findings of these studies were then assumed to be the case for adults too. However Tajfel (1981) himself says that the links between this early rejection by children of their own group, and its effects on their later development and behaviour is a guess. Referring to this Tajfel (1981:326) says,

It is, of course, difficult to establish solid links of evidence between this early rejection by children of their own group and its effects on their later development and behaviour. 'Longitudinal' studies on this subject which could trace such a development in the same individuals over a number of years, are very difficult to organise and conduct. We

can only guess, and our guesses can be helped by what we know of the deleterious effects of the 'self-hatred', about which Clark and Sartre wrote, in some adult members of minorities.

Tajfel also argues that it is not useful to exaggerate the importance of all these findings of self-hatred among children and adults as indicating serious problems of personal identity. Also he says that a person's idea about himself is at least as much or even more dependent upon continuous and daily interactions with individuals from the same social group. He argues that when this group has its own integrated norms and values and functions, 'a negative' self-image obtained through comparisons with other groups need not be the central focus of the individual's identity. Thus we see on the one hand that Tajfel himself suggesting that negative self-esteem need not necessarily be the case for minority group individuals and even questioning the basis of the claim. On the other hand the theory of social change which has been put forward by him is based on the assumption that minorities possess a negative identity when comparing themselves with the dominant group. In support of the above Tajfel says that there is considerable evidence that in contexts of comparison the minority individuals internalise negative self-esteem. The above discussion suggests considerable ambiguity regarding whether or not minority individuals possess negative self-esteem. The assumption that minorities possess negative self-esteem has been challenged in a number of ways.

Returning to the studies of minority children and self-esteem we see that empirical studies are divided in their view as to whether minority children show self-hatred or low self-esteem. Robinson (1995) provides a review of recent empirical evidence to challenge the assumption that black children have negative self-esteem on the basis of their tendency to identify themselves with whites. Three studies cited in her review are presented below. Fine and Bowers (1985) have argued that black children's failure to identify with the black doll was due to the particular economic and social contexts within which the children found themselves, and not due to a

general deficit in self-esteem. Spencer (1984), in a study of 130 black children aged between 4 - 6.5 years which assessed relationships between self-concept, race awareness, and racial attitudes (including racial preferences), showed that 80% of the children obtained positive self-concept scores and at the same time showed an anti-black/white preference in their racial attitudes. Spencer concludes that black pre-schoolers are able to effectively compartmentalise their self-concept from their racial attitudes. Banks (1984) also found that black children from predominantly white communities and schools tended to have positive self-concepts and to be anti-black/pro-white in their racial attitudes and preferences.

Empirical studies on adult and adolescents have shown that ethnic minorities have pride in their own culture and look to members of their community as a reference group and this forms the basis of positively evaluating themselves. Woollett *et al* (1994) in their study of Asian-British women found that the women were proud of their ethnic identity and culture. Stone (1985) has reported higher self-esteem for black pupils. Similarly Brigham, (1974) has argued that black children do not believe or agree with negative stereotypes about themselves or that they are inferior. Weinreich (1983), in a study of West-Indian and Asian adolescents, has shown that the adolescents did not have low self-esteem. Weinreich argues that the discrimination/self-devaluation proposition assumes that the minority group individuals consider members of the white population as the significant reference group. He showed that the minority group adolescents in general considered their own ethnic group members as the more favourable reference models than the English and thereby make positive self-evaluation. This has implications for the way in which social identity theory assumes that minority group individuals compare themselves with the dominant group and as consequence have negative self-esteem. Similarly Robinson (1995) has suggested that the self-hatred thesis is accurate in acknowledging the fact that white societies in America and Britain do not provide

positive images for black people but that it is inappropriate to suggest that black people look only to whites as their source of emulation and validation. Rosenberg (1979) says that black people compare themselves with other blacks, not whites, and that they do so on the basis of the structure of the environment in which they live. Rosenberg (1979) has also argued that there are no differences in self-esteem between black and white children.

Other studies like Kitwood (1983) have also questioned the view that living in two cultures is problematic for minority group individuals. Kitwood in his study of British-Asian Muslim adolescents found that the adolescents had a strong reference group, namely their own community. They also learned the skills of living and interacting with their white counterparts. According to Kitwood, the Muslim adolescents moved between the two cultures in their everyday lives with ease and did not indicate in anyway that this was 'problematic to their identity'. Infact according to Kitwood the anglicising of names and so on was possibly a realistic and even cynical tactic to facilitate communication. Also racism and other negative attitudes were something which individuals learnt to handle with skill. Kitwood even goes to the extent of saying that the whole idea that ethnic minority adolescents are confused about their identity is not their problem but a problem of the white observer. He argues that the latter has a problem with identification. White people are unable to deal with the conflicting sets of data such as some of the physical characteristics of the young people and other characteristics such as speaking English with impeccable regional accents and a most convenient way of explaining the contradiction is to say that it is a 'problem of personal identity' for the minorities.

Rosenberg (1979) has argued that individuals convert society's attitude to their minority group to attitudes to the self only if the following conditions are met. First, the individuals need to know how the majority feels about their group (the assumption of awareness). Second, the individuals accept the societal view of the



group (assumption of agreement). Third, the individuals accept these views as being applicable to themselves (the assumption of personal relevance). And fourth they are critically concerned about the majority group's attitude (assumption of significance). Rosenberg's argument that individuals do not always see negative evaluations of their group as applicable to themselves is supported by the following studies. Jaspars and Warnean (1982) have shown that individuals can distance themselves from negative aspects of group stereotype whilst still identifying with positive aspects. Marques *et. al.* (1988) have described the 'black sheep effect'. According to them group members can make within group comparisons of 'good' and 'bad' members, by treating 'bad' members as exceptions to the rule. This ensures the positive image of the ingroup and thereby a positive evaluation of themselves.

Another challenge to the assumption that belonging to groups having low or minority status confers low self-esteem comes from researchers studying other low status or minority groups such as women. Williams and Giles (1978) have conceptualised women as a minority and as having low status. They therefore argue that women do not achieve positive distinctiveness from their sex group. However Condor's (1986) study of traditional women showed that the women did not have lowered self-esteem and viewed their role as complementary and not inferior to their husbands. Similarly Baker (1989) in her study of first time mothers found that having a career as opposed to being a mother was not seen in terms of being successful or not; instead Baker (1989:98) says:

There was no consensus that pursuing a career is to be successful as a woman and to be a mother is not. While motherhood may be ideologically defined as having low status, this is not necessarily internalised by mothers as the basis for their social identity.

Further, individuals may have other ways of achieving self-esteem. Williams (1984) argues that women might derive greater self-esteem by developing social relationships with others than from personal self-esteem. Adopting Bakan's (1966)

terminology, Williams (1984) suggests that social identity resulting from differentiation, as suggested by social identity theory of Tajfel (1978), is an agentic social identity. She says that this represents an individual or personal style of identification more commonly displayed by men. She contrasts this with a social identity based on forming relationships by group members within and outwith the group. She argues that this could be called communal social identity. This means that the route to achieving self-esteem for women is not only through differentiation.

It has been also been argued that differentiation and discrimination are more subtle than given by social identity theory. Mummendey and Schreiber (1984) and Mummendey and Simon (1989) have discussed that when participants are given a choice of dimensions on which to rate each group, both groups are rated positively. However dimensions used to rate in-group or their own group are more positive than those used to rate out-groups. van Knippenberg (1984) has argued that in situations which are not conflictual or where there is no threat to in-group identity, members display social co-operation. This suggests that the two groups appreciate each other's qualities, although there may be disagreements regarding the importance of these qualities. It therefore becomes difficult to understand social identity exclusively in terms of comparison and discrimination.

Another criticism of social identity theory is that self-esteem may not be the only motive for comparison. A desire for cognitive coherence could be another motive (Abrams and Hogg, 1988). Brown and Williams (1984) and Brown *et al.* (1986) have also shown that if differentiation is due to implications for social identity then there should be a relationship between intergroup differentiation or ingroup favouritism and the strength of social identity. Thus the more strongly individuals identify with the group the more they discriminate because of the implications to self-esteem. However Brown *et al* (1986) and Brown and Williams (1984) did not find such a relationship. Brown argues that it is not the strength of identity which is

important but the meaning attached to it.

The number of criticisms raised against the social identity theory and its extension to the study of minorities suggests that it is not suitable for use in this study.

### ***Self-Categorisation Theory***

Tajfel's social identity theory has talked of individuals' investment in their group and the implications of group membership for their identity. Elaborating on Tajfel's social identity theory, Turner (1987) has described the cognitive processes by which individuals begin to see themselves as group members. Turner differentiates between personal identity and social identity. He argues that when individuals begin to see themselves as members of a group, there is a shift from personal to social identity. Self-categorisation theory theorises how this happens. According to Turner and Oakes (1989:243) personal and social identity are assumed to be components of the self-concept, cognitive representations of self. Specifically they are self-categorisations which are identical to some class of stimuli in contrast to other class of stimuli. Personal identity comprises personal self-categorisations based on intrapersonal similarities and interpersonal differences. Social identity comprises social categorisations of self based on social similarities and differences between people that define an individual as a member of a social category in contrast to others. Personal and social identity represent different levels of abstraction of self-categorisation. Along with these two levels of abstraction is also the level which defines an individuals' human identity. The three levels of abstraction are hierarchically organised, namely as superordinate level (self as human being), the intermediate level (social self-categorisation) and the subordinate level (personal self-categorisation). Further Turner and Oakes (1989) argue that a variety of self-categories exist at the particular levels. Which of these self-categories, at which level becomes salient depends on the situation the individuals find themselves in.

Thus as Turner (1987) says social identities will predominate over personal ones when between-group differences are seen as more salient than within-group differences. Turner (1987) says for a category to become salient it must be already available and accessible and must fit the situation or the perceptual frame of reference of the perceiver. A category is said to be available if it exists for the individual as a latent identity. Accessibility according to Turner (see Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995:110) is:

the state of category 'readiness' which is determined by learned expectations and background knowledge of what tends to go with what in the environment ... the person's current motives ... goals and values; and the degree to which that identity is highly valued and central in self-definition.

A category is expected to *fit* the situation in two ways namely, *comparatively* and *normatively*. The comparative fit depends on the perceived differences between individuals belonging to different groups compared to differences between individuals belonging to the same group. The comparative fit is described by self-categorisation theory by the principle of metacontrast (Turner and Oakes, 1989 and Oakes *et al* 1994)

$$\text{metacontrast ratio} = \frac{\text{the average perceived intercategory difference}}{\text{the average perceived intracategory difference}}$$

For example an individual can be categorised as 'Australian' to the extent that in the current comparative context the differences between individual Australians (Isobel, Jane, etc.) are less than the differences between Australians and Americans. For a category to fit normatively the perceived differences between potential categories of people must also match our stereotypic preconceptions of the characteristics of those groups. Thus through the perceptual and cognitive processes described above particular social identities or social categories become salient for individuals.

Self-categorisation is an attractive theory in that it allows individuals the



option to categorise themselves as opposed to categorisations being imposed on them by others (see Edwards 1998 for a critical discussion of self-categorisation theory). It also allows individuals to categorise themselves in different ways. Ethnic minority women may experience race, gender, class, as salient in different contexts. For example a woman may consider herself Asian if ethnicity was salient and so on. However there are difficulties with the concept of salience. According to Condor (1989) the idea that a particular category is important at given times implies that an individual is unaware of that category at other times. Condor argues that understanding categories in terms of presence or absence fails to consider the flexibility of meanings associated with particular categories. Thus at times when individuals do not take specific views of themselves in relation to particular categories they are just taking it for granted that they are there. Further Condor argues that categories are produced as intermeshing with each other when they are discussed by individuals. For example gender is implicated in nationalist and racist rhetoric and imagery.

In the same way categories given by race, gender and ethnicity are not mutually exclusive. As Condor (1989) says, Black and British identities cannot be understood as simply 'opposed to' the category woman. Each category obtains its meaning along with the others. Condor (1989) also argues that the meanings of categories are context-specific. For example the meaning of race may vary in different contexts. However, the concept of salience suggests that the categories are associated with fixed stereotypes. They are presented as independent discrete variables. As Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) argue self-categorisation theory attempts to describe the ways in which discrete identities are produced at any given time even though it could be just momentary. Flexibility in thought about categories is not recognised. Social constructionists such as Bhavnani and Haraway (1994) have also argued against using categories as discrete entities. For example they

argue that the category woman could have different meanings for different people. It could include white women, black women, disabled women and so on. Therefore treating categories as homogenous is problematic. Bhavnani and Haraway (1994: 33-34) discussing this say:

Social psychology has attempted to deal with identity as a place where variables such as class, gender, race, age, employment, status and many other elements come together. But the problem is that because psychology demands clean and uncontaminated variables the discipline is not able to cope with the idea that these issues, while named as variables, are not clear-cut or static; rather they are constantly shifting and changing, even as they are being assessed. ... Psychology stabilises identity and so impairs those characteristics which are important in experiencing and analysing identity

Edwards (1998:32) has discussed that self-categorisation theory fails to see the permeability of the idealised levels of abstraction. Edwards points out that differentiations between members of social groups (men and women, Scots and Maoris) are likely to use the same kinds of personality categories which distinguish individuals (laziness, meanness, aggressiveness and so on). This means that there are difficulties with making distinctions between the different levels of abstraction. There will be difficulties with distinguishing on sight what is supposed to be a group categorisation and what is meant to be a personal categorisation.

The mental and perceptual processes which underlie the concept of category salience are also criticised. According to Wetherell and Potter (1992) categorisation suggests a picture of the individual as an observer watching before choosing the category. This in turn suggests a detachment of the individual from society. Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995:221) also argue that cognitive processes are hypothetical constructs. Drawing on the work of critical social psychologists they suggest that the epistemological reality of cognitive processes are the construction of psychologists within the intertextual practice of scientific psychology. According to them just writing about cognitive processes therefore gives them the status of

linguistic and epistemological reality. Widdicombe and Wooffitt also draw attention to the history of thought in psychology which argues that cognitive processes are not intrinsic to the individuals' minds and that social activity should be viewed as logically prior to the individuals' minds. They therefore argue that understanding and reasoning are intrinsic to and embedded in social actions, and that thinking should be seen as part of the linguistic, pragmatic and communicative processes and not as the causes of such processes. Thus they make a case for categories to be seen as embedded in social activity and not as independent variables cognitively producing discrete identities as suggested by self-categorisation theory.

### **Ethnic Identity-formation Theories**

The third set of theories we consider are the black/ethnic identity formation theories. Robinson (1995: 99) points out that the study of nigrescence developed in the late 1960s. During this period black American psychologists attempted to outline the identity transformations accompanying individual's participation in the Black power phase (1968-75) of the Black Social Movement. Nigrescence is a French word which means 'the process of becoming black'. In contrast to social identity approaches, black/ethnic identity-formation theorists do not subscribe to the idea that minority individuals automatically possess a black identity or ethnic identity. They consider that black or ethnic identity is achieved by the individuals developmentally through a process of struggle. Whatever black or ethnic identity that individuals may possess prior to the process is not considered to be 'authentic identity'. It is considered to be either imposed by society or just learned from their parents. Authentic identity is what a black or ethnic minority person achieves after going through the struggle of identity conflict and then coming to a resolution.

The developmental model is based on the lines of Erikson's (1968) and Marcia's (1966,1980) ego identity formation.<sup>1</sup> However although the ethnic identity formation theory is based on the development models mentioned above, it is

important to note that this identity development is within the context of a social movement. It is not development in the sense used by the other developmental models, namely identity development from childhood to adult life (Cross, 1980). What has been borrowed from the developmental theories of identity proposed by Marcia (1966,1980) is the concept of development. Thus black identity development models advocate a stage by stage progression of identity development without specifying when it occurs in an individual's life. A number of models of black identity development and transformation were introduced in the early 1970s. However the best known and most widely researched model is Cross's (1971, 1978, 1980), model discussing conversion from 'Negro' (a devalued status) to 'black' (a positive identification).

Cross described a process of Black consciousness in college students during the civil rights era. Cross discusses five stages that individuals go through before attaining a secure black identity. The first is the *pre-encounter* stage where individuals' views are white-oriented. According to Cross during this stage individuals have accepted a de-racinated frame of reference and because their point of reference is the normative standard of whites they are pro-white and anti-black. During this stage they also deny that racism exists. According to Cross individuals at this stage view black as an obstacle, problem or stigma. They seldom see black as a symbol of culture, tradition or struggle. They mainly focus on overcoming the stigma of being black. During the next stage, the *encounter stage*, individuals come face to face with racism, which forces them to reinterpret their world. According to Cross during this stage individuals first experience and personalise the event (racial prejudice) and then come to see their old identity as inappropriate. Individuals then begin to search for black identity or a new identity. At the end of the second stage they have not achieved the new identity but have made a decision to start the journey towards the new identity. In the third stage, *immersion-emersion* stage, they remove



all semblance of the old identity and intensify blackness. During this period they are said to be unfamiliar with their new selves, and create simplistic, glorified, highly romantic and speculative images of what the new black self will be. During this stage individuals choose to join groups which support this immersion into blackness. Individuals also demonstrate blackness through clothes, hairstyles, linguistic style and so on. During this stage they tend to withdraw from interactions with white people. Towards the end of this stage their emotions are said to level off. Individuals' defences are replaced with cognitive openness. They are able to be more critical of what it means to be black. The oversimplification of blackness comes to an end and they begin to feel in control. The fourth stage is the *internalisation* stage where individuals separate the old identified self and the new self and move towards a positive black identity. During this stage individuals become less hostile towards whites and move towards a pluralistic and non-racist perspective but continue to keep black as the main reference group. The final stage is the *Internalisation-commitment* stage where the individuals advance on the previous stage by involving themselves in black group or community issues. Individuals are said to possess positive self-esteem, ideological flexibility, and openness about their blackness.

Cross's model has been developed from work with African-American samples in the United States of America but it is argued that other minority groups share a similar process of development (Robinson, 1995). For example Kim (1981 cited in Phinney, 1990) describes identity development in young Asian-American women in a similar way. The four stages she describes are *white identified*, *awakening to social political awareness*, *redirection to Asian-American consciousness* and *incorporation*. These models describe ethnic identity as something that individuals achieve rather than as something which is assumed because they belong to a particular ethnic group. Only the black or ethnic identity which individuals achieve developmentally is considered to give the person a



positive self-esteem. It is accepted that at the pre-encounter stage individuals possess low self-esteem. It is then argued that it is only by going through the different stages that the individuals achieve positive self-esteem. The difficulty with assuming that minorities have a negative identity has been discussed in outlining the limitations of social identity theory; the same arguments will hold in this case also.

Further the pre-encounter stage assumes that individuals are white-identified because they are not black-identified (Atkinson *et. al.*, 1983; Cross, 1978; Kim, 1981). But others like Phinney (1989) have argued that such a preference for the dominant community is not necessarily the case. It could be because the individuals may not be interested in ethnicity or may have given very little thought to it.

Further Cross's model assumes that this process of black/ethnic identity formation is a one-time event. This does not allow for re-definition of identity. The recent developments in this theory have addressed this by saying that achieving a black/ethnic identity is not just a one-time event but that it could be cyclic and may involve further exploration and rethinking of the role or meaning of the individual's ethnicity (Parham, 1989). Parham says that individuals may experience nigrescence (going through stages of black identity formation) for the first time, possibly during adolescence and early adulthood and after this experience can re-experience nigrescence as they progress through life. Parham also does allow that people can stay with one type of identity throughout their life which he refers to as stagnation. He also accepts that for some it could be a one time event. So Parham's theory allows for the fact that individuals can attain ethnic identity in different ways. That achieving ethnic identity is not a one-time event has been supported by the findings of the empirical study of Asian-British women by Woollett *et. al.* (1994). They found that women continually redefined their ethnic identity in different contexts and settings and maintained a balance between their own and the dominant culture.

Woollett *et. al.* (1994) also found that this fluid and contextually-informed

ethnicity was not problematic for the women they interviewed. This suggests that going through a process of culture conflict and resolution leading to identity formation is not necessarily the case for everyone. However all the models of black identity formation have incorporated the idea of identity confusion or conflict. Even Parham's model of recycling suggests that individuals go through the process of nigrescence when they encounter identity confusion at times in their lives.

What is interesting also is the way in which those who subscribe to this theory explain a case of positive black identity not attained by going through the stages. As mentioned earlier they argue that individuals possessing a strong black/ethnic identity without going through a development process could be due to external pressures such as parental pressure and that it is not crystallised personal identity (Parham, 1989) or that it is foreclosed identity (Phinney, 1989). It can be argued that this implies that ethnic identity obtained without exploration is inauthentic. It fails to accept that individuals can be satisfied with identities other than a black/ethnic identity. As Wallman (1983) has shown, possession of multiple options may in itself be a healthy situation. Wallman says that members of ethnic minority groups may define themselves as English, Black English, West Indian, a Londoner or a South Londoner and so on. depending on who has asked the question and why they were asked the question. Therefore Wallman suggests that claiming different identities should not be seen as problematic. This means that the white identity possessed by individuals at the pre-encounter stage need not be necessarily seen as a problem. One last criticism of the theory is the implicit assumption that there is such a thing as black/ethnic identity. As discussed for self-categorisation theory, poststructuralists argue that the category black cannot be considered to be one thing. The meanings of black according to them could differ from individual to individual.

## **A BRIEF SUMMARY AND COMMON CRITICISMS OF THE ABOVE THEORIES**

Each of the theories discussed above understand minority identities in different ways. They have theorised minority identity at both an individual and group level. All the theories focus on the relationship between the dominant and the minority community. The theories then present minority identity as a consequence of the social structure and interrelationships between the different groups. Thus *social identity theory* discusses the way in which minorities come to possess particular identities as a result of comparing themselves with the dominant group. *Assimilation and acculturation frameworks* show how individuals could opt for different levels of identification with the host community and therefore come to possess particular identification states such as assimilative, acculturative, dissociative and marginal. *Developmental theories* discuss how individuals resolve living in two cultures to move towards self-actualisation or finding their true identity.

However this assumption that minority identity is the consequence of living in two cultures and belonging to the minority group fails to address certain issues. The theories fail to consider how individuals themselves experience or find meaning in their family, community and social structure (Phinney, 1990). Autobiographical accounts of individuals who are defined minorities such as ethnic minorities and disabled persons constantly remind us that individuals themselves are concerned with providing their own meanings to their identities. They do not want to be labelled by others on the basis of their physical attributes. They argue that that is not their identity and that they are more than what is apparent or that they are different from what they have been defined as. Mairs (1994) a woman suffering from multiple sclerosis in an autobiographical account provides reasons for why she would like to be called a 'cripple' in contrast to being labelled 'disabled' or 'handicapped'. Joseph (1995), a black clinical psychologist whose autobiographical account was cited earlier also makes a similar case that she does not want to hand over the reins of self-

definition to others. Considering how individuals give meaning to aspects of their lives frees us from being stuck to just one socio-political explanation, namely minority identities are assumed on the basis of their belonging to a particular ethnic group.

Moreover the 'conflict theory' only pays attention to ethnicity. It fails to give due consideration to other aspects of ethnic minority women's lives such as employment, gender and class. This lack has been pointed out by researchers such as Woollett *et. al* (1994) and Phoenix (1994). Woollett *et.al*'s argument that theories of acculturation should take into account gender issues has been mentioned earlier. Phoenix argues that culture is not static and so for her explaining the lives of black people mainly in terms of culture (ethnicity) is too simplistic. She supports her argument with findings from her empirical study of early motherhood among black and white women, both groups coming from a working class background. In her study Phoenix found that black women did not explain early motherhood as a consequence of culture. But the kinds of explanations they gave, namely the role models they had and so on were very similar to those offered by white women. Therefore Phoenix argues that there could be other reasons for the women's choice of early motherhood such as both belonging to the working class. Moreover even when attention is given to other aspects of ethnic minority women's lives such as employment the women's working lives are said to be influenced /constrained by their culture and by the consequences of belonging to a particular ethnic group. So in this way the women's lives are mainly understood as a function of their ethnic affiliation.

The further consequence of seeing minority identity only in the context of its relationship to the dominant community is the assumption that minorities possess a negative or an inferior identity or an inadequate identity. We have already discussed how this fails to take into account that minorities need not necessarily feel inferior



about themselves or about their communities. The only way that this can be addressed is by moving away from this social construction of the minority as a powerless group.

The conclusion therefore reached is that we need to consider how ethnic minority women themselves give meaning to all aspects of their lives such as family, community, culture, issues of class, gender and work. We argue that focusing on ethnicity or treating identities as a consequence of their ethnic affiliation is not appropriate. However we have a problem with going back to traditional frameworks and treating identity as something which individuals possess. We have pointed in our discussion the possible mismatches in treating what individuals say or do not say as exposing the identity they possess. We have argued that what individuals say is contextually informed and therefore making assumptions that this reflects the identity of the individual is problematic.

Moreover individuals can construct the same identity at different times in different ways. As we have extensively discussed in our criticisms of SCT the different categories such as class, gender and ethnicity are not fixed but that they are variable and flexible. Such a view therefore questions the underlying assumption of the traditional theories that the identities of the host community and the ethnic communities are fixed entities. Moreover it is based on this assumption that the theories make postulations about the interaction between the two communities and conflict between them. Antaki *et al* (1996) argue that social identity theorists often underestimate the plasticity of self-description, implicitly assuming that the same identities are relatively enduring in microtime. According to him categories such as ethnicity are not discrete entities but they change and their meanings are flexibly constructed in relation to other categories. Similarly Phoenix (1994) argues class, race and gender are all intermeshed with each other and studies of ethnic minorities should take into consideration this complexity. So variability and flexibility poses



difficulties for the kinds of methodological and conceptual bases used by traditional theoretical frameworks for understanding minority identity. We therefore need to look for other approaches which would accommodate variability and flexibility and which considers what the individuals say in their own right without assuming that they stand for something internal.

So we consider an alternative approach to identity employed by a number of researchers such as Potter and Wetherell (1987), Wetherell and Potter (1992) and Widdicombe and Wooffitt, (1995). This alternative approach moves away from asking what type of identity individuals possess to what purposes are served by the flexible and variable constructions of identity. These researchers view identity as constructed in talk as opposed to an essentialist notion of identity. Widdicombe (1998: 195 original emphasis) succinctly describes the concerns of this alternative approach to identity. She says that the questions which are asked are *whether, when* and *how* identities are used. In a recent book called 'Identities and talk' edited by Antaki and Widdicombe (1998) a number of researchers such as Edwards, Mckinlay and Dunnet, Zimmerman, Wooffitt and Clark, Greatbatch and Dingwall, Hester, Day and Paoletti have explored this alternative approach to identity, namely identity as constructed in talk. In contrast to the view of identity as a unitary enduring entity those subscribing to this conceptual framework view identities as embedded in language. As Bhavnani and Haraway (1994:34) say,

It is in relational encounters that worlds emerge, they emerge in plots of materialised stories. And the actors are the result of encounter, of engagement. So there is no pre-discursive identity for anyone, including machines, including non-human. Our boundaries form in encounter, in relation, in discourse. Hold us still - outside social discourse - and try to measure us, and you get a mirage, a ghost or a projection of those doing the measuring... it is only in engagement that we, and everybody else, get our boundaries and our skins drawn.

The next section discusses this alternative approach to understanding of identities.

## **AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO IDENTITY**

It is useful to say something about the view of language and language use which is subscribed to when discussing about identities as constructed in language. Language is not considered as a passive medium merely reflecting or describing the world but rather as constructed and constructive and as having action orientation (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Discourse analysis, an analytic programme which has developed to a great extent within social psychology is based on this view of language as having action orientation and that people do things with language. Potter and Wetherell (1987) were the pioneers of discourse analysis within social psychology. Discourse analysis has its origins in a number of other disciplines which to a greater or lesser extent have addressed the action-oriented nature of language. Edwards and Potter (1992) list the following disciplines: linguistic philosophy (Austin, 1962; Wittgenstein, 1953), semiotics, later post-structuralism and post-modernism (Barthes, 1964; Derrida, 1977; Shapiro, 1988), speech act theories (Grice, 1975; Searle, 1969) ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 1984) conversation analysis (Sacks *et al* 1974, Atkinson and Heritage, 1984, Button and Lee, 1987; Levinson, 1983) and the sociological study of scientific knowledge (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984).

Since discourse analysis stems from the view that language does not just describe a state of affairs, the concern of discourse analysts is with identifying the kinds of actions being carried out in talk. Actions done in talk may be blaming, excusing, justifying and so on. The goals of discourse analysis is therefore to understand what is being accomplished by these actions at the interactional level. So in this way discourse analysis moves away from this notion that when people talk we are discovering an inner truth. So experiences, selves and social and psychological phenomena are supposed to be constituted in and through language (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). What this also means is that identities are constituted in and

through language. In the following section we consider the usefulness of discourse analysis for studying identities. There are two main strands of discourse analysis, namely the poststructuralist discourse analysis and the ethnomethodological variety. While both strands of discourse analysis share the view of identity as constructed in language, they also differ in significant ways. We critically examine both strands and then present the method we would be using in this study.

### **Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis**

Discourses according to poststructuralist discourse analysts such as Parker (1992) are realised in and inhabit specific textual forms. Texts are any events, objects or processes which are imbued with meaning and subject to interpretation. Discourse analysis for them is a method for study of these texts and the discourse(s) which infuse them. Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995:60) argue that poststructuralist discourse analysts see discourses as reflecting real power relations which are in turn a consequence of the material and economic infrastructure of society. Gavey (1989) a poststructuralist discourse analyst argues that it is through discourse that material power is exercised and power relations are established and perpetuated (Gavey, 1989). So in this way discourses are said to have socio-political significance.

For these discourse analysts identity and subjectivity are said to be constituted through the individuals' position in the different discourses. Since discourses reflect power relations which are a consequence of the social, economic, political factors it is implied that identities and subjectivities are also *thoroughly political* (see Widdicombe's critique, 1995). Moreover it is argued that the positioning in different discourses allows individuals to experience power differently because different positions are related to different positions of power (for example doctor-patient in medical discourse). Researchers using this form of discourse analysis therefore determine the relevant discourses present in texts and the positions they make available for individuals. They then examine the power relations which

are facilitated by the discourses by considering the historical and structural conditions which give rise to the particular discourses (Wilkinson, 1991; Parker, 1992, see also Widdicombe's critique, 1995). As Hollway (1984) argues the role of discourse analysts is to theorise the relations of knowledge and power and the productions of subjectivity within those relations. So for those who subscribe to this view such as Gavey (1989) and Parker (1992) identities are regarded as a moral and political issue, not just an intellectual concern (see Widdicombe's, 1995).

An extract from a study of Macpherson and Fine (1995) of young women's views of race and gender is analysed using poststructuralist discourse analysis in the following section. This illustrates the way in which assumptions are made about power and its effect and also the type of interventions therefore necessitated by the analyst. We begin by considering how discourses are identified and how individuals are considered to be positioned in these discourses.

#### Extract 1

( extract from Macpherson and Fine, 1995; 189-190)

Michelle: We're moving into race and culture... Can you think of a time where your race or ethnicity...

Pat : And this includes you, Sophie.((laughter))

Sophie : Oh, I know.

Michelle: ... made a big difference in the situation you were in, but you didn't quite know how to handle it.?

Sophie : I don't want to go first.

Pat : If you thought of one, go on;

Sophie : Okay, I will. When I was in ninth grade I would run track all year. And I had dentist appointment and I had to... I couldn't run with my team, so I had to run around the school..., the block... and I went with this girl. We went running, and we did like four blocks. On the fifth block there were a bunch of, like, teenagers milling around, from the big public school which had just gotten out. One group, there like four guys and three girls, one of the girls was pushing a baby carriage with no baby in it. First time we went by them, the guy tried to trip us, he said, 'Stop!' but we kept running. The next thing I knew, the girl with the baby carriage pulled out a lead.... a hollow pipe, or something like that, and was hitting me on the back with it. I was totally shocked. I had no clue about what was going on, so I kept run-running. And I came around the corner, and she threw it



at the other girl I was running with, and a crowd of people, like, stopped her. The only reason I could think she would attack me is ... I was not carrying any money, obviously, all I was wearing was running clothes.....

Shermika: 'Cause you was white.

Sophie : ...Yeah I was white. Right, and I don't know how to react to it, because -I spend a lot of time... I commute home on SEPTA [public transportation] through North Philly, I spend a lot of time as a minority racially? And I can understand resentment , definitely against ... having enough money to go to a private school and having the advantages in life. But I don't know how to deal with the situation where I don't know this person at all. It was just blind racism, I think, or classism, I wasn't really sure.

Shermika: Stupid?

Sophie : Yeah ..... it was a weird situation. I don't really react as a racist. That's so against what I've been taught by my parents and by my school. I wasn't saying, 'All black people are violent, inherently.' That would never occur to me . But I don't know how to handle it. Because I was feeling a lot of guilt. Why should I go to this school and she shouldn't? Why should I have a decent life and she shouldn't? It was really weird situation.

Michelle: Were you mad at her though?

Sophie : No, I wasn't mad at her. I couldn't be mad at her because it's not fair .Maybe I should now, but I wasn't mad at her

Michelle: No, I'm not telling you what you should.....

Sophie : No, I wasn't mad at her, that was the weirdest thing about the situation.

The participants of Macpherson and Fine's study included a white woman, two black women and a Korean. The young women were brought together to discuss issues of race, gender and class. Macpherson and Fine identify two discourses from the young women's talk, namely discourse of sameness and discourse of difference. Macpherson and Fine argue that the discourse of difference versus sameness which structured the young women's thinking about blacks and whites are currently in play in American cultural politics. In this way they show that the discourses identified in the young women's account are the result of historical and structural conditions. Positioning themselves in these two discourses makes available different power positions for the young women. Macpherson and Fine illustrate how certain discourses can suppress the expression of particular subjectivities for these women.



They discuss how Sophie the white girl is positioned in the 'sameness' discourse. According to them Sophie positions herself in this discourse because she wants to avoid being seen as different from the other young women who were of different ethnicity. Particularly since positioning herself in difference may implicate her as being racist. It would place her in an unequal power relationship with the other young women. Macpherson and Fine further argue that positioning in the 'sameness discourse' prevents Sophie from acknowledging her identity as white. Thus the constraints of her context prevents Sophie from positioning herself in a discourse of difference. Macpherson and Fine (1995:191) say that

She (Sophie) again resists 'white' as her identity... and again robs herself of mobile positions from which to react. She assumes and rejects the racism of white responses, half naming ('racis...') and half coding it ('racial'), leading her back to her question: Is racial difference always unequal, i.e. racist? Sophie is cemented in the sameness discourse. Unable to dabble in difference lest she dabble in racist anger, racist fear. Stuck in sameness, with neither anger nor pleasure. This is a position familiar to white women, amidst women of all colors, exploring gender while denying race.

So the analysis presents Sophie as someone who has denied herself an identity. According to Macpherson and Fine, by resisting 'white' as an identity, Sophie has become someone 'without much of a cultural identity'. The analysis used by Macpherson and Fine has problematised Sophie for being in this position. They further argue that this was the case not only for Sophie but for all the other women. They say that the group (the young women) were originally positioned within the *suffocating* sameness discourse (my emphasis). Moreover they point out that positioning of the women in the sameness discourse actually contributed to perpetuating inequality (difference). Discussing this Macpherson and Fine, (1995: 187) say,

the 'polite silence' about differences naturalised both the privileged and deficit positions, assuming their unassailability and yet

recreating, ironically, their static and oppositional identities.

Macpherson and Fine go further to talk about how the women liberate themselves from this situation. According to them in the safe environment provided by their interview situation the women are able to locate themselves in the discourse of difference enabling the creation of other subjectivities (identities). This relocation occurs when Shermika labels Sophie's experience as racism and thereby begins to dabble in difference. They go on to suggest that Shermika, by acknowledging the stupidity of the attack, breaks the sameness discourse. This, according to the researchers, is supposed to enable the women to address the difficult issues of inequality rather than avoiding it. The researchers' political agenda therefore was to liberate Sophie and the other young women from the discourse of sameness. It is implied that by doing so Sophie and the others were helped to find other meaningful positions. By enabling the women to be positioned in politically sound discourses it is argued that these researchers can provide people with better ways of understanding themselves or constructing their own subjectivities. In this way the analyst is able to expose the ideological workings of specific discourses in texts. This exposure is seen as the analyst participating in political intervention. It is also suggested that this form of discourse analysis would empower people. As they say (1995:186):

This version of discourse analysis allowed us to explore where 'voices' get their words, ideas, points of view and motivations to speak ... and how voices in *safe and challenging conversation* can change and be changed by collective talk, inquiry and revision.

Such political interventions by the analyst is argued to be a way of giving voice to those who are powerless.

However there are some problems with this discourse analytical method. In the above analysis Macpherson and Fine impute the discourse of sameness and difference to their text on the basis of their knowledge of existing social and political

structures and the power relations they bring about. While we do not deny the existence of socially perpetuated power relations what we argue against is the assumption that it takes a particular form. However this is precisely what seems to happen in this type of analysis. We observed this in the extract above. We find that Macpherson and Fine ascribe a particular meaning to the interaction between the black and white community. They assume that there is a particular type of unequal power relation. There is also an assumption that this understanding is universally accepted by those living in that society. What therefore follows is that the power relations affect all individuals of that society in similar ways. Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) in their critical discussion of this type of discourse analysis point out that by adopting certain specific assumptions about contemporary society and the material basis of social construction the researchers are unavoidably trading in a specific form of social political theory (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995: 60). Also this type of discourse supposes that individuals are constrained by the nature of the society they live in.

Making assumptions about the nature of contemporary society and how it affects people brings up problems similar to what has been identified for traditional approaches. We find that poststructuralist discourse analysis fails to take into account that social structures themselves are not fixed but that they are constructed in talk, when people interact. There are as we already mentioned certain common understandings of how that particular society is organised and what type of power relations are at play. But how these common understandings are perpetuated, worked up and affect peoples lives can only become apparent when we consider what individuals do with them in talk. Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) argue that there is a tendency towards ascriptivism in this type of discourse analysis. To avoid this what is needed is focusing on is the social functions of language. Discussing this tendency of poststructuralist discourse analysis to consider discourses as solid or

as having a particular shape Potter (1996:102-103) says,

Post-structuralist discourses and codes can be thought of as prefabricated wall and ceiling sections that can be used as parts of very different buildings..... Its (poststructuralist discourse analysis) main shortcoming is that it treats the parts as solid prior to the building. What we actually need to imagine is that the bricks are soft and vague in outline, so that they only snap into shape as they are cemented into place. And the prefabricated sections must themselves be somewhat inchoate, with their solidity emerging as they are bolted together. Everything exists in a fuzzy and fluid state until crystallised in particular texts or particular interactions.

Another difficulty with the tendency of treating individuals as being positioned in the solid discourses is the kind of assumption that individuals have no or limited agency. Using examples from her study of youth subcultures Widdicombe (1995) has shown that in the details of talk members display and achieve resistance to what is generally known and assumed about their lives, their lifestyles and their identities. Her analysis presents individuals as those with the ability to resist; they are not immobile. Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) also query the implicit claim made by those subscribing to this type of discourse analysis that intellectual work should be political work. Widdicombe and Wooffitt argue that they are not opposed to the aims of these discourse analysts to make some active political intervention. But they consider seeing the entire framework as a political exercise as problematic. They argue that this establishes even at the outset the limits of the analysis and what is legitimate and proper for the analysts to address. Widdicombe (1995) also points out that although empowerment and giving voice to people are considered important, in reality this type of discourse analysis fails to attend to the finer details of people's talk. This means that some of the important consequences of interaction, the kinds of issues that particular interactional sequences are oriented to address are overlooked.

Attending to the details of talk are a group of discourse analysts, namely those subscribing to the ethnomethodological type. They focus on the actions being performed in people's talk. They also consider how such actions address interactional



concerns. In the following section we discuss the ethnomethodological type of discourse analysis.

### **Ethnomethodological type of discourse analysis**

There are a number of discourse analytic programmes which belong to this type such as interpretive repertoires (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) and discourse analysis which is sensitive to the organisation of talk (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995, Edwards and Potter 1992). Potter and Wetherell (1987) draw on the concept of *interpretative repertoires* to explain what people did when they produced different accounts and to take account of the concept of variability. Potter and Wetherell (1987:149) define interpretative repertoires as:

recurrently used systems of terms used for characterising and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena. ....A repertoire is constituted through a limited range of terms used in particular stylistic and grammatical constructions. Often a repertoire will be organised around specific metaphors and figures of speech (tropes).

Potter and Wetherell (1987) were able to show how individuals drew on repertoires to explain particular situations or concerns. Individuals could use different interpretative repertoires to explain the same action or belief. We will illustrate what is meant by a repertoire from a study by Marshall and Raabe (1993) of political discourse. Marshall and Raabe have followed the discourse analytic method outlined by Potter and Wetherell. Marshall and Raabe (1993:38) describe how they used the method. They point out that they identified recurrent patterns of linguistic constructions or repertoires by taking out instances where there appeared to be terms, phrases or metaphors linked to the concepts of privatisation or nationalisation either in terms of similarity in structure or content or differences in variability in what was being said. One of the repertoires Marshall and Raabe identified was the repertoire of 'efficiency'. They explain how the repertoire of efficiency was used by both the conservatives advocating 'privatisation' and by liberal candidates advocating



'nationalisation'. Marshall and Raabe point out that 'efficiency' was used as the main argument in support of privatisation. In extract 2 they suggest that the speaker equates efficiency with privatisation.

Extract 2  
(from Marshall and Raabe, 1993:40)

- Int: What do you think are the effects of privatisation?  
C2: Well what are there, efficiency covers a real wide scope doesn't it in respect of the efficient running so you get a better service for whatever industry or thing it is and a lower cost.

Marshall and Raabe go further to discuss how speakers advocating for nationalisation use the 'efficiency' repertoire. This is observed in extract 3 where the speakers work towards breaking down the presumption that privatisation equals efficiency and nationalisation equals inefficiency. The argument made by the speakers is that efficiency can be acquired within nationalised structures too. The following extract illustrates this.

Extract 3  
(from Marshall and Raabe, 1993:41)

- L1: In some instances, of course, price is neither here nor there. Certain provisions need to be made such as the National Health Service.  
I think if it was run properly on a nationalised basis then,  
you could have equal efficiency and innovation.

So we find that candidates with opposing political views use the repertoire of efficiency to address their particular cause. In this way what efficiency meant depended on the interactional context and the purposes for which it was used. What Potter and Wetherell's method does is to point out how particular phrases, metaphors or terms such as the use of 'efficiency' in the above example are linked to the topic being discussed to bring about certain desired effects. The concept of repertoires has been useful to understand a variety of social phenomena because it constructs a particular version of the phenomena under discussion. Returning to what is our concern in this chapter we find that identities, one such social phenomena can also be

understood as something which is constructed in talk. Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995: 134) advocating this way of understanding identity say,

Identity is not seen as a thing that we are, a property of individuals, but as something we do. It is a practical accomplishment, achieved and maintained through the detail of language use... identity accomplishment is regarded as functional in-so-far as the details of identities are designed with a view to achieving some task or in pursuit of everyday concerns.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) have discussed this by pointing out how categories are discursively produced. They argue that people themselves work out and address 'attributions', 'personal identity', 'group membership', 'social categorisation' and so on in discourse. We illustrate how this is done by drawing on a study by Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Wetherell and Potter (1992) focusing on Pakeha New Zealanders (white colonial settlers) views about the indigenous Maoris. Potter and Wetherell discuss that within a single account produced by a Pakeha, Maoris were described in a number of ways. They were described as 'average Maoris', 'Maoris who are friends', 'Maoris who can be invited into the house', 'the Maori people' and 'extremists'. The different descriptions suggest that a category such as 'Maori' is not a discrete entity but is formulated in different ways in talk. Further the different ways in which the category was formulated in talk depended on the functions it was designed to serve in that conversational context. Referring to this Wetherell and Potter (1992:77 ) say that the

...pattern of categorisation no doubt depends on some 'cognitive events', just as speech depends on a physiology of mouth movements and on brain chemistry. Yet, clearly, the meaning of these categories, their function and thus their social and psychological significance is established within their discursive context. Indeed the meaning and the definition of these categories will change as the discursive context changes.

However this type of discourse analysis mainly focuses only on the content of talk. Other researchers such as Widdicombe and Wooffitt, (1995) and Edwards and

Potter (1992) have proceeded further than the focus on content and pointed out that there are conversation devices or strategies which permeate talk and bring about a desired effect in the conversation. They focus on how the strategic use of conversation devices enables the conversation to be worked up to address particular interactional concerns. Edwards and Potter (1992:154-160) put forward a discursive action model to explain how they go about doing discourse analysis. Their model has three sections: action, fact and interest, and accountability. Edwards and Potter begins with emphasising action over cognition. They argue that it is important for analysts to attend to what individuals are doing in talk such as excusing, blaming reporting and so on, instead of focusing on what they are thinking. They then argue that individuals' accounts are oriented to managing what they call as the dilemma of stake. Individuals treat each other and also groups as having desires, motivations, allegiances and biases. Therefore a person's talk can be viewed by others as a display of the former's interestedness. Edwards and Potter argue that such concerns are displayed in individuals' reports and attributional inferences. Therefore it becomes the participants' concern to produce accounts which attend to interests without the account being treated as interested. The dilemma of stake or interest, is often managed by doing attribution via reports. However as Edwards and Potter argue reports will successfully manage the dilemma of stake only if they are displayed as factual or have a rhetorical organisation which prevents them from being undermined. Reports are therefore constructed/displayed as factual by way of a variety of discursive techniques such as lists, extreme case formulations, vivid descriptions and so on. The third part of Edwards and Potter's DAM model is accountability. As already pointed out in the interactional context individuals are aware that they are accountable to each other. That is individuals are in some way oriented to the expectation that others will attend to what they say as a product of stake or interest. As Potter (1996) says a blaming can be discounted as merely a

product of spite and an offer may be discounted as an attempt to influence. Individuals talk is therefore tailored to attend to the accountability of the current speaker's action, including those done in their reporting. Thus identities, categories, category entitlements are all worked up using different conversation devices in a number of ways depending on the dilemma of stake or interest managed in the given interactional context. What is very important to remember is that when we talk of individuals managing interests and so on we do not mean that this is a deliberate effort on their part. Rather it is something which is a taken-for-granted tacit knowledge. Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995:77) make the following observation from Garfinkel's (1967) and Sacks's (1992) work, namely that there is a wider range of culturally available, taken-for-granted tacit knowledge which individuals draw on as interpretative resources to make sense of the actions of others and also to inform their own actions and behaviour.

Similarly Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) focus on the details of talk. In their study of youth subcultures have discussed how the importance of subcultural groups is worked up by the participants in their accounting. Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) refer to the use of discursive devices and strategies by participants in formulating their accounts. To explain what is meant by a discursive strategy we refer to a few examples from Widdicombe and Wooffitt's (1995) study.

Extract 4  
(from Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995:164)

1	I	huhha, is it very important to you
2		being a punk hippy?
3	R	ah dunno I jus sort of (.) happy
4		as I am jus (it's)
5		the way I want to be so (.)
6		that's that hhh

Analysing extract (4) Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) discuss that the participant does not produce an affirmative or negative answer to the interviewers question, about whether being a punk is important. Instead the participant characterises the



subcultural membership in terms of personal preference. Since the participants' assessment of subculture's significance is in terms of one specific point Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) label it as a minimal evaluative response. Widdicombe and Wooffitt proceed further to point out that the purpose of such a response is to avoid the negative connotations of making a negative or affirmative response. If they made a negative response then the question which could be asked is why the participants continued to dress the way they did. On the other hand making a positive response would allow for others to assume that they were just conforming to peer pressure and so on. The minimal evaluative response enabled the participant to treat the question of measuring importance as irrelevant. Instead what it makes relevant is that being a punk is just a way of being. Widdicombe and Wooffitt term the response as possessing a 'just is' character. The minimal evaluative response that the participant makes to address the interactional issues is described as a descriptive strategy. Sometimes the descriptive strategies were made up of a number of components. This we observe in extract (5).

#### Extract 5

(from Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995:168)

- |    |   |   |                  |
|----|---|---|------------------|
| 1. | I | is being a punk very                    | ((smiley voice)) |
| 2  |   | important to you?                       |                  |
| 3  | R | yeah very indeed                        |                  |
| 4  |   | I couldn't imagine myself being         |                  |
| 5  |   | straight at all                         |                  |
| 6  |   | (.) like dressing neatly in tidy        |                  |
| 7  |   | nice clothes an' having my hair         |                  |
| 8  |   | down and all that hh                    |                  |
| 9  |   | na I can't imagine=probably             |                  |
| 10 |   | in a couple of years' times             |                  |
| 11 |   | I'll be like that but I-I-              |                  |
| 12 |   | at the moment I can't imagine it at all |                  |
| 13 | I | mmhm=                                   |                  |
| 14 | R | =I mean it's that way I wanna be        |                  |
| 15 |   | an' I wanna stay an' really             |                  |
| 16 |   | that's it (huh huh)                     |                  |

The participant responds by saying that being a punk is important. The participant

further goes on to reject being anything else other than being a punk. This is done through the use of a descriptive strategy which has the following components. First, the participant produces an answer/assessment. In line 3 the participant answers in affirmative to the interviewer's question. Second, the participant rejects alternatives. In line 4 the participant argues against being anything else. The third component is a nomination of the rejected alternative. In this extract the alternative nominated is being 'straight'. The fourth component is listing the attributes of the category. The list has a three part structure (Jefferson, 1991) and this is one of the conversation devices used in talk. Thus in lines 6-8 the participant lists the attributes of being straight as dressing neat and tidy in clean clothes, having hair down and all that. The final component of the strategy is making a summary assessment in which the participant formulates an upshot of what has been said so far (lines 9-16). Thus for Widdicombe and Wooffitt their method involves identifying the descriptive strategies and the components which make up the strategies. Moreover the components are made up of discursive devices such as use of lists and so on. Although the clarity between the terms is a bit fudged what we can suggest is that descriptive strategies are much broader units and they are constructed in a variety of ways including the use of descriptive devices. So the method followed by Widdicombe and Wooffitt is to identify how talk is constructed through the use of these descriptive devices and strategies and for what purpose. They draw analytical conclusions based on what is being achieved through the use of these strategies.

Finally let us illustrate the advantages of using discursive strategies and devices by going back to the study of the views of conservatives and liberals on privatisation and nationalisation by Marshall and Raabe. As mentioned earlier they inform the reader that the repertoire of efficiency was used to advocate privatising. In the following extract from their study the speaker does this first and then goes on to make an evaluation that it is a good thing. What Marshall and Raabe do not tell us

is how it is worked up in the conversation to stand as an argument. Analysing the extract further we can identify a number of devices which the speaker uses to portray privatisation as a good thing.

Extract 6

(from Marshall and Raabe, 1987:39)

C2: There are certain section like, a good example would be council refuse. I think that's a good thing to be privatised and I think it has been, in a lot of councils and they've found not only is it sort of cheaper, but it's more efficient and I think there are certain things like schools where there are certain sections that could be privatised which are not.

First, the speaker supports her claim that privatisation is useful by providing an example where privatisation has worked. The example provided is privatising refuse disposal. The speaker then argues that it works by pointing out that it has been tried not just in one case but many cases. Thus the speaker talks of privatisation of refuse as being tried out in a lot of councils and as having worked. So it is a valid process. Second, the speaker works to minimise the effects of arguments against privatisation, namely that it is done only to save costs. The speaker accepts lowering of cost as one of the consequences but proceeds to point out that this is not the only consequence. Efficiency is offered as another consequence. Third, we find the speaker portraying her support for privatisation as something which is not blind support. The speaker does not just make a claim that privatisation per se is good. The speaker is portrayed as a critical observer who sees privatisation's usefulness in certain areas. We find that the speaker repeatedly uses the terms 'certain sections' and 'certain things' when advocating for privatisation. Summarising, the components of the conversation strategy used by the speaker are supporting the argument with an example, portraying the example as something which is valid by providing information of the many places it has been tried, minimising the effects of counter arguments and by portraying the viewpoint as moderate and not something which is followed blindly. What we are suggesting therefore is that to have a better understanding of what

respondents do in their talk our analysis should not stop with focusing on content alone.

### **WHICH METHOD TO CHOOSE?**

Having considered the features of both poststructuralist discourse analysis and the ethnomethodological variety we now come to the question of what type of method we would use in this present study. I would like to argue that the method followed would primarily be the type of discourse analysis worked out by Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995). We are also convinced that there is presence and influence of discourse(s) in the way it is referred to by poststructuralists in the interactional context. However we do not view these discourses as solid and fixed but as something malleable and changeable within the interactional context. Our argument for the existence of discourses in the postructuralist sense stems from what we also hear a number of discourse analysts of the ethnomethodological variety stating. A number of discourse analysts subscribing to the ethnomethodological variety refer to 'what participants orient to'. They also discuss about the how in the interactional context the associated characteristics or features of categories are made relevant. (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998). This means that certain ways of understanding particular categories already exist. So the method we would follow is viewing how talk is worked up using a number of discursive strategies/devices and at the same time being aware of the way in which existing discourses are constantly drawn into the interactional context and worked with. Having now spelt out the discourse analytical framework within which this present study is situated we will illustrate our method by analysing the same extract of Macpherson and Fine (1995) earlier analysed using poststructuralist discourse analysis. The analysis illustrates how identities are produced and resisted in interaction.

Analysis of the extract using discourse analysis which is sensitive to



organisation of talk suggests that Sophie does not resist white as an identity as Macpherson and Fine have argued. Analysis of Sophie's account of the mugging incident using this type of discourse analysis shows that Sophie constructs being white as the cause for being mugged. Sophie is oriented to the kinds of issues which could arise if she said openly that it was a racist attack. It could present her as being racist. In this respect this analysis is similar to what has been said by Macpherson and Fine. The difference however is in their claim that Sophie resists her white identity. By drawing on the resources available in the conversation and using particular conversation strategies, Sophie is able to show that she was attacked because she was white without appearing to be racist. The following illustrates how Sophie does this.

She does not mention the identity of her attackers as black. She makes mention of a group of 'teenagers milling around'. So it could be any group of teenagers, black or white. Sophie then goes on to portray that her attack cannot be seen as the result of provocation. She portrays the ordinariness of the activity they were doing. She says that she and her friend were just running for practice. She says that even when provoked they didn't respond: they continued to run without reacting. Second she suggests that her attack was not due to her class. This is done by providing certain information. She says that she had no money and just wore ordinary clothing. Her information works towards informing the listener that there was no way in which the attackers could have made assumptions about her class from her appearance. Her discounting of both provocation and class as reasons for her attack then suggests to the listener that there has to be another reason. Considering that the discussion is about a situation where race made a difference it can be argued that her accounting allows the listener to conclude that it was race which was the reason for the attack. In this way Sophie allows her listeners to infer that the reason for the attack is because she is white and the others black. Her

strategies are successful, because we see that one of the black women does explicitly ask her after her account if the attack was because of her being white. In the process Sophie's white identity is also established. At the same time avoiding explicit mention of the race issue avoids her from being considered as racist. This is different to how Macpherson and Fine view Sophie as someone who is denying herself of her white identity.

Further Sophie explicitly states that she is aware of inequalities and differences between groups. She then argues that this forms the basis of her not being racist. She is portrayed as being able to see the unfairness in situations where some have certain advantages and others not. Here her construction of her 'not being racist' identity is confirmed by her explanation. However Macpherson and Fine argue differently. They say that Sophie is unable to dabble in difference because she is stuck in the sameness discourse. They argue that this is because difference is always equated to racism. But by focusing on the details of talk it is possible to see that Sophie is discussing difference. It is true that the discourses of sameness and difference influence the interaction. However the difficulty begins when the political concerns of the researchers lead to overlooking what is actually happening in talk. As Widdicombe (1995; 111) says

it is precisely in the mundane contexts of interaction that institutional power is exercised, social inequalities are experienced, and resistance accomplished.

Criticising the poststructuralist discourse analysis she further says:

that by elevating their own political agendas as the pre-established analytic frame, researchers may actually undermine the practical and political utility of the analyses they undertake.

It is only through attending to what individuals say is it possible to understand that identities and other discursive actions are produced, made relevant and managed to address real interactional and inferential issues. We therefore

conclude that being sensitive to what is happening in the interaction is important for understanding how, where and when identities are produced.

Before moving on to the next chapter we need to say how this method which we have selected for this study overcomes some of the limitations of the traditional approaches to identity. Recapitulating, the limitations of the traditional approaches are listed as: inability to see women's identities as multiple and flexible, inability to address the complex nature of ethnic identity considering that ethnic identity has many components; inability to see how participants themselves give meaning to identity and the focus on measuring identity because they saw identity as the property of individuals. By contrast the discussion of the alternate approach to identity has pointed out that identities are what individuals accomplish in talk. Such a view of identity considers identities not as enduring entities but as flexibly produced in talk. Different identities emerge in the interaction depending on the interactional business at hand. Further focusing on the flexible nature of identity liberates us from the pressure of trying to measure identity and its many components. It is in this way identities as produced in talk overcomes some of the limitations of the traditional approaches.

## **CONCLUSION**

The focus of this chapter was to identify an appropriate conceptual framework for understanding the identities of employed ethnic minority women. It has been argued that understanding identities as constructed in talk is useful to understand minority identities as complex, flexible and multiple. Using language as the conceptual framework liberates from seeing identity as a unitary and enduring entity. It has also showed a way of overcoming the limitations of traditional theoretical frameworks such as acculturation and assimilation approaches, social identity theory, self-categorisation theory and black identity formation theory. Finally it was argued that discourse analysis which pays attention to organisation of talk is a useful analytical

method for use in this study. In order to use this analytical method the empirical study will involve collecting participants' accounts of what they think of membership of the minority group, its culture, their employment and so on. The next chapter will outline the research design used in the study.

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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Marcia (1966, 1980) suggests four ego identity statuses based on whether individuals have explored identity options. According to him a person who has not explored or made a commitment is said to be diffuse. If a commitment is made without exploration it is said to be foreclosure. A person in the process of exploration without making a commitment is in moratorium and a firm commitment after a period of exploration is said to be achieved identity.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will outline the research design which was used in this empirical study. The rationale for selecting particular ethnic minority groups to participate in the research will be outlined. Further we will also outline why particular interview techniques were used and also state the reason for making changes to the techniques. We also discuss the consequences of making such shifts in the interview methodology. As already pointed out the analytic method decided for use in this study was discourse analysis. We will discuss the steps taken for doing the analysis.

#### **RATIONALE FOR SELECTING PARTICIPANTS FROM FOUR ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS**

Ethnic minorities have emigrated from different continents or sub-continents, and so the respective place of origin of the people is the basis for defining the ethnicity of individuals. Wallman (1986) argues that in Britain the term ethnicity signifies allegiance to the country of origin. Thus individuals who have emigrated from South and South-east Asia are generally referred to as Asian and those from Africa as Black African. The ethnic classification used in the census study of 1991 was adopted in this study. The reason for selecting this classification was because this represents the way in which ethnicity is presently defined within and outside the academia in Britain. These categories are also those recommended by the Commission for Racial Equality for use in ethnic monitoring (Mason, 1995).

The 1991 census lists a number of non-white ethnic minority groups living in Edinburgh. However practical considerations made it impossible to include all the ethnic minority groups. There was limited time scale and limited resources (a single researcher). A few of the larger ethnic minority communities were therefore selected for this study. In Edinburgh the four large ethnic minority groups are Pakistani,

Chinese, Indian and Black African (census 1991). The study therefore focused on employed women belonging to these groups.

### **INTERVIEW TECHNIQUE- FOCUS GROUPS**

Focus groups have been suggested as a useful research technique for studies of black women. Morgan (1988, 1993) has argued that focus groups are useful when working with categories of people who historically have had limited power and influence such as people of colour and those with limited income and literacy skills. Further in individual interviews there is an unequal distribution of power between the interviewer and the interviewee. This can be intimidating to the interviewee and can affect the interview process. The interviewer can redress the situation by being sensitive to issues of power. However this sensitivity can sometimes prevent the interviewer from asking certain interesting questions. This may be compounded in situations where the interviewee is already in a vulnerable position, such as belonging to a minority group. Contrasting this with a focus group situation it is found that power is distributed within the group especially when the researcher plays a facilitative role. It is worth noting that moderators of focus groups can take on different styles. When the style is one of facilitation the interviewer is present mainly to introduce the topics for discussion and to get the conversation going. The researcher's role in this case is expected to be very minimal. It is the participants who hold centre stage. For those in a vulnerable situation this can be an empowering situation. In the present study focus groups enabled participants to discuss in an open way. Further because the participants were the majority in numbers it contributed to addressing the power imbalance. The women found it easy to challenge each other and ask each other questions. The women were not bound in the same way as the interviewer who needed to be sensitive to power issues.

Moreover the additional advantage of focus groups is that it allows the

space for individuals to interact. This enables the generation of additional information. Since in this case the interview questions used were semi-structured, it allowed the space for participants to introduce their own themes apart from responding to the question. Given that the theoretical focus is on the construction of identities during interaction, focus groups were useful for providing the space for women to interact and discuss the areas which are addressed in the research. Focus groups have been suggested to be useful for exploring the range and patterns of subjective perspectives in a relatively short time (Morgan, 1988). Further focus groups can be undertaken with limited funds and limited personnel (Morgan, 1988, 1993; Krueger, 1994; Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). So in this way focus groups serve certain pragmatic functions. As a single researcher this was a particularly useful way of getting a number of participants' views without having to meet them individually.

Further using focus groups was also useful to minimise the potential difficulties which could arise for the researcher working with women from ethnicities other than her own. In this case as one who has an Indian origin I was working with women from three other ethnic minority groups, namely Pakistani, Chinese and Black African. Gumpertz (1992) suggests that the interpretation of what a speaker conveys rests not only on socially constructed knowledge of what the encounter is about and what is to be achieved but also on the additional, taken-for-granted evaluative and interpretative criteria which emerge during the course of interaction. And according to him individuals from different cultural backgrounds rely on different taken-for-granted rhetorical strategies. Gumpertz was able to show that South Asian participants and White interviewers were unable to negotiate shared understandings about matters which were crucial to interview success because they relied on different communicative strategies. In an interview situation where the interaction is between the researcher and the participant the ethnic differences

between the two can lead to communication difficulties. However in a focus group situation since the communication was primarily with other members of the group, the ethnicity of the researcher became less important. Considering the above discussed merits of using focus groups we decided in this study to use it as the interviewing technique. Once the interview technique was decided on a number of further considerations had to be addressed. We discuss them below.

### **HOMOGENEOUS VERSUS HETEROGENEOUS GROUPS**

Participants were recruited from four ethnic groups. The question was whether the groups will have a mixture of ethnic minority women from the four groups or whether the groups will be homogeneous for each ethnic group. Accepting that interaction between participants is the primary function of focus groups raised issues for having heterogeneous focus groups made up of women from different ethnic minority groups. Following Gumpertz's (1992) study of intercultural interviewing it was argued that communication can be difficult if participants belonged to different ethnic groups, since the taken-for-granted strategies relied on for interaction varies from group to group. So separate homogeneous focus groups were convened for women belonging to different ethnic groups. Also having homogeneous focus groups provided the participants with a common ground and gave them the confidence to interact with each other. This also attended to any resistance from participants belonging to different communities being categorised into a common group namely, ethnic minority. Further this addressed any resistance that participants may have due to cultural or religious reasons regarding participating in a group with women from other communities. Particularly given that the group was not a support group which met over a period of time it was important to avoid situations which could lead to conflicts. In support group situations the participants would have the space to get to know each other and also feel safe to express



differences. Moreover having separate groups provided the space for participants to look at issues relating to that particular group. For example the reaction of Pakistani men to women's employment may differ from those of African men. In a mixed group sometimes the discussion can become lopsided and focus on only one particular group resulting in the views of women from other groups remaining unheard. Having separate space to look at issues freed the participants from the political pressure of finding common ground with women from other ethnic minority groups. For the above reasons it was found useful to have homogeneous groups with regard to ethnicity. Similarly it was decided to have separate groups for participants who were married and single. Groups were also separated on the basis of high status work and low status work. Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) suggest that mixed groups of individuals of unequal status can prevent those with lower status from expressing themselves.

Thus in this study separate focus groups were organised for women from the four ethnic minority groups namely, Pakistani, Chinese, Indian and Black African. Each ethnic group was further categorised as married mothers and young single women and also with respect to the status of their jobs. Thus four focus groups were convened for each ethnic group. For example women from the Pakistani community were divided into, married high status group, married low status group, single high status group and single low status group. Since four ethnic groups were selected for this study recruitment involved getting participants for 16 focus groups. Given that each group were going to meet twice a total of 32 focus groups sessions were organised.

### **SIZE AND DURATION OF THE FOCUS GROUPS**

Stewart and Shamdasani, (1990) suggest that a useful focus group size is 6 to 12 individuals. More than 12 is suggested to be a large group and less than 6 as dull. In

this study the number of individuals in each focus group was limited to a maximum of six for the following reasons. First, limiting the number gave the women the space to express their views. Fewer numbers enabled the women to feel safe enough to explore issues. Moreover since the analysis followed involved detailed analysis of talk it was considered useful to have enough space for conversations to develop. It was also argued that greater number of participants would result in too many interruptions and affect the quality of the conversation. Further it was decided that the duration of the group would be approximately two hours long. This is the recommended time limit by those who advocate the use of focus group interviewing.

### **LANGUAGE USED IN THE FOCUS GROUPS**

The language used in the focus groups was English. This is because most of the women in employment were able to communicate in English. All the single young ethnic minority women who participated in the study were educated in Britain and spoke fluent English. Some of the married mothers did lapse occasionally into their mother tongue. Since I can understand Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi at a general conversational level I was able to follow the conversation in the Indian and Pakistani focus groups. All the Black African women spoke English and so I did not encounter any language difficulties in those focus groups. Only in the married low status Chinese focus group one woman did not speak English. However this was managed by other participants translating for her. Initially before taking the decision to conduct the focus groups in English we had considered the use of an interpreter or a facilitator who spoke the language of the participants. However we discounted the use of interpreters and other facilitators for the following reasons. We argued that an interpreter would change the dynamics of the group. The option of having a facilitator for particular groups was also ruled out because that would mean a change of facilitating style for that group. Another reason for not choosing this option was

because a facilitator who is not familiar with the subject would be unable to steer the conversation to cover the topics which needed to be discussed for the research. What I had decided was that in case such a situation should arise the sections of the interview in languages other than English would be translated later on.

## **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

The interview questions were semi-structured. Ten to twelve well- developed questions have been suggested by Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) as a useful number of questions for focus group interviewing. Kreuger (1993) provides suggestions for the structuring of the interview schedule. Kreuger suggests that topics of most interest should be dealt with first. Then within each topic general questions have to be asked first and then the more specific questions. However he says that this may be changed according to the requirement of the researcher. The topics for the study were discussed in two focus group sessions. In the first session issues of employment, meanings of community and experiences of discrimination were addressed because these were considered as meriting prior attention. In session 2, the importance of cultural aspects to the participants and their respective communities and how they are practised were discussed. The interview questions were modified when they were used to interview single women. For example participants were asked to give their views instead of an account of their experience for questions about marriage and so on. The interview questions are given in the appendix.

## **GETTING WOMEN TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH**

Some of the participants were work contacts. I had worked in a mental health project for ethnic minority women and had contact with ethnic minority women working in both statutory and the voluntary sector in Edinburgh. So this helped in recruiting a

number of the participants. Others were recruited using the snowballing technique. Given the fact that in Edinburgh ethnic minority community is fairly small participants generally had contact with other members of their community. They therefore introduced me to friends and relatives who were interested in participating in the study.

Participants who were recruited were provided the explanation that the project was to do with understanding the identities of employed ethnic minority women. I had also explained to the participants that the purpose of doing this research was so that the meanings that they gave to 'what is their identity' and the identity of their communities is brought out. Further, it was an opportunity for them to discuss issues of identity. Participants were told that the research was for my PhD study.

None of the participants recruited raised difficulty with comprehending the concept of identity. It was something they were familiar with. The difficulties they expressed were to do with issues of anonymity and confidentiality. They did not want fellow participants disclosing outwith the research context what they had shared of their personal lives. Since Edinburgh has very small ethnic minority communities there was the potential for the women knowing each other or of each other. So I had to explain how confidentiality would be maintained and to what extent it would be maintained. This reassurance was important for the women. I had also explained to the participants that anonymity would be maintained by changing names and also through not mentioning places of work and so on, which might identify the participant.

Jarrett (1993) doing focus group interviews with low-income African-American women found that meeting the women personally (using personal recruitment techniques) was important to ensure participation. Having worked with ethnic minority women in support groups for some years I had found from



experience that it is very difficult to get women to participate in groups. It was difficult work contacting the women, explaining the purpose of the research and making them feel safe enough to participate in the research. Sometimes I phoned the women and sometimes visited them in their homes or at work to discuss the purpose of the research. In most cases the women agreed but there were a number of women who did not want to participate. One of the main difficulties was negotiating a suitable time for all members participating in a focus group. I spent hours getting a suitable time. Sometimes this meant I could not accommodate times for one or two women. So they could not be included in the research.

The place where the focus groups interviews took place was also crucial. Since having the interviews in the University of Edinburgh's Psychology department could be intimidating, I organised the interviews to take place at three local ethnic minority projects in the city. All the projects were familiar to the participants and offered them the safety required. This meant that I had to hire the rooms. I was able to do it through a small grant from the Psychology department. Some of the married participants also said that they would have difficulties with childcare because the interviews were in the weekends or evenings (other times were not suitable because the women worked). This was managed and participants with children were encouraged to participate by offering creche facilities. The cost for this was also borne by the department. One of the focus groups was held in an individual's home.

I recruited women to participate in the focus groups and began with conducting focus group interviews for married women belonging to the four ethnic groups. After interviewing the married women interviews were set up for single women. In some groups low-status and high-status women participated. This was because the women were invited along by friends. In the black African group there were some women who belonged to the Afro-Caribbean origin. For a number of the focus group interviews the participant turnout was good. However there were others

where participants failed to turn up. Sometimes it was difficult to set up focus group interviews for particular groups of women. It was difficult to get married women belonging to the African community and in low status work to come together for a group interview. The difficulty was because most of them were in shift work. The turn out for groups organised for single women was also low. Although the women agreed to come to the focus groups very few managed to come. After trying this out for a few times it was evident that this was not going to work. So for these groups the research technique was changed and instead of group interviews, single interviews were conducted. Even with this change the number of single women willing to participate were still quite low than was expected.

## **SINGLE INTERVIEWS**

The same interview questions were used in the single interviews. But the time for each session was 45 minutes to an hour. A number of the single interviews were also held in participants' homes. A feature of the single interviews was that participants spoke sometimes about personal concerns which were not related to the interview topic. In a number of instances this meant offering them some form of practical support such as letting them know where to get help. Sometimes this meant getting leaflets on the type of information they required and sending it to them. In many cases this was because the participants knew that I worked in a mental health project. Further during my interviews with the single (unmarried) women I identified a gap in service provision and this led to setting up four time-limited therapy groups for young employed ethnic minority women between January 1997 and June 1998 at the project where I worked. I also facilitated three of the groups along with another colleague.

**THERAPEUTIC VALUE**

In a number of interviews participants said that it gave them an opportunity to consider what being an ethnic minority woman meant to them. Some participants mentioned that they considered it therapeutic to talk of their experiences, particularly those who spoke of discriminatory experiences. They also added that they were glad that their experiences would enable a wider audience to see the difficulties encountered with being a minority.

**TOTAL NUMBER OF WOMEN INTERVIEWED**

The women were interviewed twice. A total of sixty one women were interviewed singly and in groups for the first session. However there were some drop-outs in the group interviews for session 2. The total number of women interviewed in session two was fifty two.

**NUMBER OF FOCUS GROUPS AND SINGLE INTERVIEWS HELD**

Total number of focus groups held – 17

Total number of single interviews – 24

Married women

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| 1. Focus Groups      | 14<br>(7 for session 1 and 7 for session 2)   |
| 2. Single Interviews | 11<br>(4 women were interviewed for session 1 and 7 were interviewed for session 2.<br>3 single interviews were held for those who had earlier participated in the focus groups for session 1. This accounts for the increase in the number of single interviews for session 2. ) |

Single Women

- |                 |                  |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. Focus Groups | 3<br>(session 1) |
|-----------------|------------------|

## 2. Single Interviews

13

(4 women for session 1 and

9 women for session 2.

Here again single interviews for session 2 were held for 5 participants who had participated in the focus group interviews for session 1 accounting for the increase in number of single interviews for session 2)

Among married participants 3 of them who participated in the focus groups for session 1 could not attend the focus groups for session 2 due to practical difficulties. These participants were offered single interviews.

Among the single women it was difficult to get participants who came for the session 1 focus groups to attend focus groups for session 2. So they were offered single interviews. Even for the three focus groups which were held for session 1 the turnout was very low. For one focus group (Indian H. S. group) 2 women came of the 7 recruited and for the other two focus groups (Pakistani H. S. group and Pakistani L.S. group) 3 women participated in each group out of the 5 women who were recruited. However when the participants for the single women's groups were recruited they all agreed to come but on the day did not turn up or only a few turned up. Moreover those who did not come did not phone the interviewer even though they had her home and work number. It can be tentatively suggested that the participants did not seem to be committed to attending the interviews. We cannot go further than making a tentative suggestion because it would mean speculating without a proper basis.



**FEEDBACK TO THE PARTICIPANTS**

The interviews were held during the period November and December 1996. After the interviews some of the participants expressed a desire to have some feedback regarding the findings of the research. I have promised them that I will provide them with a summary paper once the research is completed. Although the interviews were done four years ago, I will still be able to contact most of the participants, particularly the participants who had requested feedback and give them the summary paper.

**THE PARTICIPANTS – WHO THEY WERE**

The 61 participants who were interviewed came from different work backgrounds. Given below are details of how many women were employed in the various employment sectors such as Government, Voluntary, Private and so on. The data is presented for the four groups, namely married women in high status work, married women in low status work, single women in high status work and single women in low status work.

Married Women

High Status Work

University Lecturer	1
College Lecturer	1
Edinburgh District Council (Administrative posts)	4
Voluntary Sector (Project Managers, Project Workers and Finance Managers)	13
Managed own Business	6
Pharmacist	1
National Health Service (Ward in-charge, researcher, Manager and counselor)	4

Social Work Department (Social worker)	1
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Of the 31 women interviewed in the married high status group, 9 of the participants had earlier done low status work such as working as a Library assistant, care assistant, hairdresser, sales assistant, office junior, crèche worker, shop assistant or waitressing. One of them continued to work as a library assistant work on a part-time basis along with her regular high status work.

<u>Low Status Work</u>	<u>No of women</u>
Waitressing	2
Domestic Helper	2
Private firm (Clerical work)	2
Shop Floor assistant	1
Edinburgh District Council (Library assistant)	1
National Health Service (Care assistants)	2
Voluntary Sector (Crèche workers)	3
Employed in a Private food factory	3

Single women

<u>High status Group</u>	<u>No of women</u>
National Health Service (Nursing)	2
Private Finance firms (Chartered accountant and Manager)	2
Private firm (Landscape Architect)	1
Voluntary Sector (Project Managers)	3
Manager- High Street Shop	1

<u>Low status Group</u>	
National Health Service (Care assistant)	1
Shop Assistant	3
Barmaid	1

## **INTERVIEW PROCESS AND TRANSCRIPTION**

The interviews were tape recorded. The tapes were then transcribed verbatim. As mentioned earlier the importance of confidentiality was taken into consideration and the women and names and details such as place of work which could identify the individual were changed or omitted in the transcripts. The transcription stresses readability and so does not use detailed transcription notations such as intonation, intake of breath and so on. The numbering used is however helpful to enable the reader to locate what the researcher is talking about. The researcher in the analysis refers to line numbers.

## **ANALYSIS**

The transcripts were read a number of times. Then parts of the transcripts were selected for detailed analysis. The selection was informed by the areas which had been identified as necessary for an adequate study of the identity of employed ethnic minority women in Chapter 1. Sometimes topics of importance emerged from the reading of the transcripts themselves. As mentioned earlier the kind of analysis used was discourse analysis. The process of analysis was long and tedious and transcripts had to be read over and over again. The identified extracts were analysed many times, many drafts were made before I could see what was being accomplished by the participants in talk. Initially my focus was more on content of what the participants were saying. It was difficult to move away from this and to begin to see the actions being done by the participants in talk such as downplaying situations, discounting the significance of particular issues, comparing and contrasting with others and so on. I identified various conversation strategies and devices which participants used to address the concerns raised during interaction. Some of the devices which were identified in the participants' accounts were three-part lists (Jefferson, 1991; Wooffitt, 1992), contrast structures (Atkinson, 1984; Heritage and

Greatbatch, 1986), gists and upshots (Heritage and Watson, 1979), extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986), use of reported speech (Wooffitt, 1992; Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995) and vivid descriptions, (see Edwards and Potter, 1992). I am not describing what these devices are at this point since I am describing them as and when they were identified in my analysis. The effort put into the analysis did pay-off because it enabled me to see how the participants addressed issues of relevance to their lives in the process of interaction. Instead of assuming what the participants said as meaning something I was able to understand from identifying the actions being performed what participants were accomplishing in their talk. The analysis helped to see how participants constructed meanings of membership to the minority group, their culture and their identity as ethnic minority women. However there is a potential concern with showing that the empirical evidence I have generated in this study is applicable to the everyday lives of the participants. It could be argued that interview situations are not an everyday occurrence and hence what has been shown in the study cannot be generalised to everyday living. Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) have addressed this concern. They argue that it is most likely that individuals draw on the same communicative competencies and resources which they use in their everyday lives and use it in the interview context. In this way what happens in the interview context will reflect what individuals do in their everyday conversation.

### **SHIFT FROM FOCUS GROUPS TO INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS: CONSEQUENCES**

The interview methodology which was initially used in this study was focus groups. However as already discussed due to the difficulties encountered in doing the research, for some groups, single interviews were held. A question raised therefore is how this shift in technique influenced the nature of accounting. Particularly since

in the group situation the participants interacted more with their peers in contrast to sole interaction with the interviewer in the single interviews.

We had to consider two main issues when the shift was made from focus groups to individual interviews. First, we had to consider the effects on the interview process because of the differences between the interviewer's cultural, religious and academic background and that of the interviewees. In this study the ethnicity of the researcher is Indian. We had earlier argued that in the focus group situation the interviewer's ethnicity would not affect the interview process when the interviewer worked with participants from other cultures, since the primary interaction was supposed to be between the group members. However in the individual interviews the interaction was going to be between the interviewer and the interviewee. In this case the issues of difference would become relevant when the interviewer worked with participants from the Chinese, African and Pakistani communities. The second issue which arose with the change in interview technique was whether there was a difference in the kinds of accounts produced in the focus groups and the individual interviews. We consider both these issues.

### **Researcher's cultural, religious and academic background: Influencing the interview process.**

There are discussions within disciplines such as Sociology, Social Psychology, Psychology and Women's studies about how issues of power, ethnic differences and so on impact on the nature of the interview. We are cautioned to be sensitive to the 'issues of difference' when working with participants from other cultures or backgrounds other than our own. It is argued that the issues of power and difference structure and provide different positions for groups such as men and women, black



and white women, abled and disabled, Chinese and non-Chinese women, the academic and layperson and so on. The study of Macpherson and Fine (1995) which we have earlier discussed in chapter 1 is one such example. Here the interviewers are conscious of their own White middle class status and the different backgrounds of the young women they had discussions with. The interviewers use this understanding when discussing their analytical findings. They argue how difference prevented participants from raising issues which could be viewed as disruptive to the interactive context. According to them participants hesitated to discuss the issue of racism because one of the participants in the focus group was White and also the interviewers were White.

These are important considerations which any researcher working with participants from other backgrounds or cultures should address. This was also one of our reasons for selecting focus groups as the appropriate interview technique for this study. The obvious consequence therefore of the shift in interview technique is that some of these difficulties would become relevant. Particularly since as already mentioned the ethnicity (Indian) of the interviewer is different from those of participants from the African, Pakistani and Chinese communities. However when the changed circumstances resulted in having to work with individual interviews I did not find it problematic. This does not mean that the issue of difference was not brought up. What I am arguing is that it should not be viewed as a problem. The reason for this again stems from the focus of this study on the discursive construction of identities and categories rather than viewing them as fixed entities.

Discourse analysis enables us to move from assuming that the interviewer's position as an academic or her ethnic background structures the interview process in

a particular way. Instead we were able to consider how these issues were addressed in the participants' accounting itself. So instead of the differences between the researcher and the participants being a problem discourse analysis helped us to see how differences were worked with and resolved in the interview context.

In fact studies using discourse analysis such as Day's (1998) field study of two factories in Sweden consisting of a large number of immigrant workers points out that the power of categorisation is used by the participants to disqualify even someone who belongs to the same social group from claiming a place which is legitimately theirs. Day points out how this is done to address the interactional concerns at hand. So in this way categories and group memberships are what participants accomplish in talk rather than pre-given or fixed.

Therefore instead of assuming that particular power differences exist between the interviewer and the interviewee and that the category entitlements of the interviewer and the participants are fixed we proceed to consider how participants and the interviewer jointly address differences where it was made relevant. We will be elaborating on this further in Chapter 8 where we will be pointing out from the findings of the analytical chapters that issues of reflexivity such as the different ethnicity of the interviewer are made relevant in this study in our participants accounts. One of the strengths of discourse analysis is that the interviewer's talk is taken together with the participants' talk in the analysis. Therefore the analysis considers the effect that interviewer's responses have on what is being socially produced in the interaction. We now proceed to address the second issue which was raised with the shift in interview technique.

## **Do accounts produced in focus groups and individual interviews differ?**

What we found transcribing participants' accounts was that in the group situations participants were explicitly challenged about their views on particular issues by other participants. In these situations participants worked with the challenges and either continued to stay with their point of view or worked with other views to jointly produce a mutually acceptable version of the issue being discussed. This we observe in Chapter 7 where one of the participants says that her community has a negative attitude to women working. The other participants challenged her point of view. This meant that the participant finally produced a version of the community attitude which suggested that negative attitudes towards women working existed for some people and not everyone. So together in the interactive context participants produced joint versions. At the same time the participant avoided compromising her own position.

In the case of single interviews what we observed was that participants oriented to the understanding that their views could be undermined by others or other points of view. In these cases participants accounts displayed sensitivity to the interactional consequences of their accounting. Speaking of monologue interactions Wooffitt (1992: 70) says:

When producing accounts their (speakers) descriptions will display the speaker's sensitivity to and reasoning about, the interactional consequences of the utterances produced, although there may be no recipient actively participating in the interaction. These utterances may therefore be investigated to reveal the various design features employed in their construction.

Wooffitt further discusses that the speakers' sensitivity to what is being accomplished by their talk can be understood by considering the points where

speakers change the trajectory of their talk or do repair work of the earlier stretch of account. In other words speakers orient to how their accounts could be undermined by others and change or modify their earlier stretches of accounting. Wooffit goes on to add that although the interviewer may be to a greater extent non-participatory in that the interviewer is not interrupting the interviewee with questions yet the minimal responses that the interviewer is making such as Mm mm, yeah, ok also have orderly properties and indicates to the recipient how the account they are producing is being received by the listener.

Thus in the single interviews the participants did not particularly find any difficulty with talking about the issues of community, community attitudes, experiences of discrimination and so on. In fact in most of the single interviews participants did go into large monologue sections of talk with the interviewer making only minimal responses. Therefore what we are arguing is that monologue talk shares similar properties with talk which is produced by many participants and therefore is not problematic when doing the analysis.

## **FOCUS ON COMMUNITY**

In chapter 1 I had argued that we should consider other aspects of our participants lives and not just ethnicity. It was therefore suggested that the participants working lives should be given consideration. It was also because of this that work was the first topic to be addressed in the first section of the interview schedule for session 1. The final section of the interview schedule for session 1 dealt with community and experiences of discrimination at work. While work as a topic was still considered (chapters 5,6 and 7 focus on the working lives of the participants) the thesis began

with looking at community. The reasons for this shift were the following. First, when the transcripts were analysed I found the most interesting and new findings about work were the participants concern with how influences such as culture were expected to structure their working lives. Another area of interest was participants orientation to the understanding that racial discrimination and the attitudes of the community should structure their working lives in a particular way. Participants' accounts displayed sensitivity to this. However with respect to some of the other questions which were asked such as the advantages and disadvantages of working and aspirations and career, the analytical findings of the participants' responses resonated with findings of previous research on women's work. While that in itself is not a reason for not considering these responses it was decided that within the limits of the thesis the new understandings which were being brought out should merit attention. Secondly, although the section on community was small in the interview schedule the way in which meanings of community was formulated in our participants accounts brought out a number of new issues in contrast to earlier theoretical formulations of community and community boundaries. It therefore seemed right that the thesis begins with considering the participants responses about who they considered was their community and their responses to the importance of culture before proceeding to consider how their own community and the dominant community influenced their working lives. Moreover as discussed in chapter 1 the two main components of ethnic identity are membership to the minority group and involvement with the cultural practices of the minority group. Hence from a theoretical point of view also community and culture seemed to be a good place to start.



So while work was still given attention in the thesis and 3 of the 5 analytical chapters dealt with it we began the thesis with considering meanings of community and the importance of the aspects of culture for the participants.

## **CONCLUSION**

Women from the following ethnic minority groups, Pakistani, Indian, Chinese, Black African/Afro-Caribbean participated in the study. The interview techniques used were focus group interviews and single interviews. The interview schedule was semi-structured allowing the participants flexibility to discuss issues related to the areas addressed in the interview schedule. The next five chapters are analytic chapters and address the following: membership of the minority group, importance of culture, influences on the participants' decision to work, discrimination and attitudes of the communities to working women.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **MEANINGS OF COMMUNITY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The two main components of ethnic identity are minority group membership and aspects of culture. In this way minority group membership is mainly portrayed as offering group members a social identity, namely ethnic identity. The way by which minority group membership confers this social identity on its members was elaborated in Chapter 1. Moreover we also discussed the difficulties with traditional ways of understanding social identity. We argued that identity should not be viewed as something definite, internal and fixed but rather as produced in the interactive context. So we suggested that instead of viewing participants' accounts as revealing inner realities we need to focus on what is being accomplished in talk. This will enable us to understand what membership of the minority group actually means to the participants rather than assuming that membership conferred particular identities on the participants. So our focus in this chapter is considering how membership of the minority group became participants' concern in talk.

In the interviews with the ethnic minority women, they were asked to address the question of community. Analysing the accounts we consider the different ways in which participants describe what community means to them. We also focus on how community boundaries are drawn and how participants distinguish their community from other groups. We also consider how some of the participants discounted existing understandings of community and in doing so formulated alternate versions of community. Finally we consider the challenge by some participants to the idea that community defines their identity or who they are supposed to be. The concluding section of the chapter begins with drawing together the findings of the analyses. The ways in which the participants' discussion of community resonate or depart from the theoretical understandings of community are also discussed.

However an important question remains. Why ask the women to talk of community when our focus is on ethnic minority group membership? We address this by outlining our rationale for using the concept of 'community' in the section below.

### **RATIONALE FOR ASKING WOMEN TO SPECIFY COMMUNITY**

Traditional social psychological theories assume a relationship between social identity and social groups/social categories. As Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995:214) point out, the assumption is that any social identity depends upon membership of a social group or category. Thus minority group membership offers individuals a particular social identity namely ethnic identity. As discussed in Chapter 1 this ethnic identity provides individuals with a sense of belonging and also a purpose. Moreover belonging to a group separates individuals of that group from other groups. Individuals belonging to the group are said to become similar to each other and to become depersonalised (Turner, 1987). This loss of individuality has been questioned in recent years. Studies such as those of Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) of youth subcultures have highlighted that loss of individuality is not something which is acceptable to individuals. Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) discuss how participants in their study resisted labelling themselves as belonging to a particular category. They argue that the resistance is because of the associated implication that they have lost their individuality in acquiring a social identity. Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) therefore argue that the concept of community may be a viable alternative to social groups and categories. Cohen (1985) suggests that the concept of community can accommodate different individuals without compromising their individuality. However if we consider the literature dealing with the concept of community we come across different meanings of community.

The concept of community is lately understood in two ways.

The first approach views community as an integrating mechanism (see Cohen, 1985). This approach assumes that the individuals belonging to the community hold something in common. In the integrating tradition, commonality is also considered to mean uniformity. In a way community as an integrating mechanism accomplishes in part or full what social groups or categories did and do. One of the ways in which the concept of community is currently used in lay and academic circles is in the above sense. Thus the concept of community is used to mean affiliation to one or more categories like ethnicity, religion or politically-defined group. Ballard (1979) discusses community in terms of ethnicity. She refers in her writings to Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. Stopes-Roe and Cochrane (1990) in their study use the category label "Asian communities". Butcher (1993) makes a distinction between communities in terms of ethnicity, religion or occupation and community in terms of living in a common geographical location. For Butcher the former represents interest communities and the latter territorial communities. Butcher, by classifying in this way, has separated the physical-spatial bases of community and psychological affiliations based upon common category membership (see also Husband, 1996).

Similarly Yuval-Davis (1994) discusses that notions of community are used politically to represent oppressed groups such as 'women' and 'ethnic minorities'. She suggests that the notion of community has become popular among Left circles in the West, particularly in Britain. Following the work of Freire she suggests that 'community' represents an egalitarian and homogeneous grouping of individuals who share in the process of empowerment and fight against their oppression. Further these groups are promoted as alternatives to traditional methods of representation such as trade unions and political parties. According to her women and ethnic minorities have been the focus of these mechanisms to create fair representation. Butcher

(1993) argues that there is a 'value' dimension to the conceptualisation of community. For him all forms of communities, particularly cultural, religious and ethnic groups, offer meaning to their members lives. The individual is able to bring together a sense of the relationship of self to others. Therefore the individual's action is informed by a sense of collective purpose and benefit. So here community is seen as an integrating structure whose members have a common way of thinking, feeling, believing and behaving. Summing up we can say that in the integrating sense what community offers individuals is a collective identity, a sense of belonging and purpose.

The second approach is that community is an aggregating device (Cohen, 1985). It is argued that commonality exists only in form and that the meaning given to community by the individual members will vary. Here commonality is not equated to uniformity. However although members know that there are significant differences between each other they still see still view themselves as being a group and as distinct from other groups. The way in which this is accomplished is by having shared symbols. However the maintenance of difference and individuality is upheld by members giving different meanings to the shared symbols. In this way commonality and individuality are brought together and are not seen as mutually exclusive. As Cohen (1985:21) says:

Just as the 'common form' of the symbol aggregates the various meanings assigned to it, so the symbolic repertoire of community aggregates the individualities and other differences found within the community and provides the means for their expression, interpretation and containment. It provides the range within which individuality is recognisable. It continuously transforms the reality of difference into the appearance of similarity with such efficacy that people can still invest the 'community' with ideological integrity.

So what is being argued is that the appearance of similarity is a mental construct rather than a reality. In the above discussion the integrating and aggregating senses of community are presented as two different ways of



understanding community. So what we find is that the concept of community instead of being different from the concept of social groups and categories encompasses the latter. From our discussion of the concept of community we argue that participants when asked about community would discuss about their membership of the minority group. There are further reasons for using the concept of community.

As mentioned earlier the concept of community is the current term used in relation to minority group membership. Moreover the concept of community when applied to minorities is broader than membership of the minority group, specified purely on the basis of ethnicity. Community accommodates not only ethnicity but religious and political affiliations. Therefore considering community addresses one of the main criticisms that we raised about traditional theories of social identity, namely their focus on understanding minority identity only in terms of ethnicity. Further the concept of community can be said to be broad in yet another way. As we have already discussed it can mean both structured social groups/categories or something looser and less structured.

So in this study the participants were asked to specify their community instead of just asking them about belonging to a particular ethnic group. We had spelt out at the very outset that our interest is in the way identity is constructed in talk. Therefore our concern when considering the responses of the participants was with the usage of concepts and ideas of community membership in participants' talk rather than focusing on membership of the minority group as fixed. In other words we are not interested in treating the responses of participants as revealing inner meanings. Rather what we are interested in is to see what the responses are orienting to and what is being made relevant in their accounts.

In this study the participants were asked the following questions, namely "Who would you consider as your community?" or "Who would you say is your community?". A number of the respondents specified community as a religious or

ethnic or political community. But there were also those who rejected notions of community. The rest of the chapter focuses on analysing the different responses.

## **BASIS FOR EXISTING AS A COMMUNITY**

Earlier in our discussion of community we suggested that community exists because its members possess some commonalities. Even when community was described as an aggregating device, the possession of shared symbols was suggested to be necessary for the members to view its existence as authentic. In a number of the accounts which we analysed participants discussed possessing shared characteristics as the basis for their existence as a community after specifying their community. Participants also provided other reasons for existing as a community. In this section we analyse three extracts to consider the different ways in which participants specify their community and formulate the bases for its existence. In doing so participants use a variety of conversation devices.

### **Possessing shared Characteristics**

In the first extract both the respondents, R and R1, specify community as a religious community (lines 3-4, 9 and 20) and state that they exist as a community because of shared characteristics.

#### **Extract 1**

##### **Indian H.S. M.W. S1 group<sup>1</sup>**

- 1 **I.** So who would you say is your community or define as community for  
2 yourself  
3 **R** I think my community is as a community would be from my  
4 religious community. I would think of them as a community.  
5 I think the right people to me are my friends we can be good friends,  
6 but somehow I couldn't say the word my community.  
7 To me community is more how you are brought up, the way, your way of  
8 thinking and your way of relating, I look at it as a community.  
9 I look at it as a religious community rather than a overall picture.  
10 **R1** mm. I suppose I would very much support what R was saying  
11 in that for me it is, I suppose, it is, a shared values, a shared beliefs,

12 the shared way of looking at things.  
 13 That's what forms part of what I consider my community,  
 14 and because the community that I belong to is very broad and inclusive  
 15 in that there'll be, there'll be, way of looking at education,  
 16 there'll be ways to deal with the ethics in life, or you know,  
 17 what do you do about everything, rearing your children or whatever,  
 18 that for me that that does become,  
 19 yes if I were to be asked what is your community,  
 20 I would say it is Ismaili Muslim community; that is my community.  
 21 That's what I feel I belong to, that I suppose gives me my identity.

R and R1 produce three-part lists through which they define community as existing because of shared characteristics. R says community is a group of people who share a common upbringing, have similar ideas and behave in similar ways. She says in lines 7-8: community is 'how you are brought up', 'your way of thinking' and 'your way of relating'. Similarly R1 defines community as a group of individuals having 'shared values, shared beliefs and shared ways of looking at things' (lines 11-12). A three-part list is a conversation device. It is used to indicate that the items in the list belong to a general class of which the instances cited are only examples (Jefferson, 1991). Use of the three-part list therefore suggests to the listener that members of the community have a number of things in common. It also emphasises that individuals have come to be a community because they satisfy a particular norm. Community is not something which happens haphazardly. In this way both the respondents establish what community actually means to them and why they are a community. The participants' concern with describing what community means to them also emerges from R1's further description of community as 'broad and inclusive' (line 14) and as something which gives her identity (line 21). We have already discussed that the idea of commonality is often worked up in discussions of community. We also added that one of the reasons for portraying community as having shared characteristics is that of providing individuals within a group a sense of belonging and an identity. Here we see participants R and R1 drawing on this available cultural knowledge to construct their version of community.

Further when R and R1 specify community as their religious community they

are also oriented to the fact that community can be understood in different ways. In academic and lay understandings there are different meanings of community. As mentioned earlier it could mean religious, ethnic or political community; it could also mean people who live in a geographical area or people with whom the individual interacts as friends. That the two speakers are oriented to the fact that their version of community is only one way of describing may be suggested by the way both of them preface their accounts. R's and R1's accounts are prefaced with the words 'I think' (line 3) and 'I suppose' (line 10) respectively. These words present R's and R1's description of community as very much their individual points of view. Latour (1987) and Latour and Woolgar (1986), based on their work on fact construction in science and technology, have suggested that statements made by individuals lie in a continuum. At one end of the continuum are statements prefaced by words such as 'I think that.....', 'I believe that...' and 'I know that...' and so on. These statements are used to indicate to the hearer that what is being said is to be seen as being highly contingent on the mental processes, knowledge and desires of the speaker. At the other end of the continuum are statements which are expressed as though they may be considered commonplace and can be assumed to be the case. (see also Edwards and Potter, 1992)<sup>2</sup>. It follows from the above discussion that the participant's accounting for their description of community as their point of view acknowledges the existence of other versions. Moreover describing community as their point of view serves certain pragmatic functions. If R and R1 described religious community as the only way of seeing community it is open to challenge. However acknowledging that there could be other versions avoids their being challenged about it.

### **Shared characteristics versus Partiality to own group**

In the next two extracts we find a situation where the basis for existing as a

community is formulated in other ways. The analysis describes how participants in their accounting work with the different versions.

Extract 2

**Pakistani. L.S. M.W.S1**

- 1 **I** mm, who would be your own community for you?  
2 **Y** Muslims  
3 **I** you would  
4 **Y** prefer to be friendly  
5 **Q** Asians  
6 **I** no I'm just asking whether how you think of it feel free to talk about it  
7 because I don't have any  
8 **Y** no no thats why I told you that  
9 **R** Asian from Pakistan or even India China so many countries  
10 **B** so many  
11 **R** middle east you know and thats it  
12 **Y** I have got two or three very nice Scottish people but when I join my  
13 **I** group  
14 **Y** from Pakistan I like it's a different  
15 **B** you know the same language, the same habit or same culture. That's why  
16 you feel easy you know.  
17 **I** So for you that would be the most important community?  
18 **P** Ya  
19 **I** That being a Muslim, being part of from Pakistan  
20 **Y** because the culture everything is the same  
21 **I** Having the same things  
22 **B** You feel, you sit and you feel comfortable you know.  
23 **Y** Yes, talk to our religion because everybody knows the same religion.

In extract (2) possessing shared characteristics is provided as one basis for people to exist as a community. B, one of the participants in the group, by using a three-part list, says that they are a community because they have the 'same language, the same habit or same culture' (line 15). B again uses a three-part list to discuss what possessing shared features means to members of the community. She suggests that having these commonalties enables participants to feel comfortable with other. She says in line 22 'you feel, you sit and you feel comfortable'. B's list portrays a sense of togetherness for members of the community.

In the same extract another participant provides another basis for existing



as a group, namely partiality to their group. This is done in two ways. Y states her preference for the Muslim community. She says in line 4 that she 'prefers to be friendly'. Another way by which Y portrays her partiality for this group is through contrasting her community with Scottish friends and making it clear that the two groups cannot be considered as similar. She says 'I have got two or three very nice Scottish people but when I join my group from Pakistan I like it's a different' (lines 12-14). However the implied prejudice through her account of partiality is downplayed by her use of the word 'nice' when referring to the Scottish people. Y's downplaying of her prejudice is still not considered as adequate by the group. We can argue that this is the case because of what happens further on in the account. Participants, instead of staying with this version of community, produce two other versions of community. One version is that community exists because of shared characteristics. The other is through defining community as a much more broader ethnic group. In line 5 one of the participants specifies community in terms of the broader category label Asian.

The interviewer treats this broader category formulation as a way in which the other participants counter Y's narrow formulation of community. Moreover she treats the others' formulation as addressing her exclusion from the group since she is a non-Muslim. This observation can be made on the basis of what the interviewer says in lines 6-7. She reassures the respondents that it is alright to use the narrow labelling. The interviewer says 'feel free to talk about it because I don't have any'. Her statement is to be heard as she doesn't have any problem with Y stating that she prefers to be friendly only with Muslims. Y responds by clarifying that she is not being sensitive about excluding the interviewer. In line 8 Y says 'no no that is why I told you'. In spite of the interviewer's reassurance the group still treats Y's label as problematic. In lines 9-11 the participants continue to broaden the category label. They elaborate on the category label Asian by discussing the different communities

which it includes such as Pakistani, Indian and Chinese. They sum up by saying it includes 'so many countries' in lines 9-10, including the Middle East (line 11).

However we find that Y continues with her narrow version of community. In lines 12-14 as already mentioned Y talks about her group from Pakistan as different suggesting that she still finds community meaningful only in this narrow sense. It is at this point the version of community as having shared characteristics is offered. This version of community is acceptable to Y because we find her using it in her further accounting. After the explanation for existing as a community on the basis of shared features is offered, the interviewer as a way of summing up comes back to the version of community as outlined by Y (line 17). At this point Y doesn't go back to her earlier explanation but works with B's alternative explanation of being together as a community because of shared characteristics. Y says that they are a group 'because the culture everything is the same' (line 20) and because 'everybody knows the same religion' (line 23). When offering her second explanation Y uses the extreme case formulations, 'everything' and 'everybody' (Pomerantz, 1986). Extreme case formulations are used when individuals are oriented to the fact that what they say may not receive a sympathetic hearing from the listeners. In this case the extreme case formulations are used by Y to deal with the possibility that her second explanation for being together as a group may not be accepted by her listeners. Particularly in the light of her earlier slightly prejudiced version for being together as a group. However even while working with the alternative explanation Y still upholds the importance of religion in the forming of community by specifying religion as one of the shared characteristics. In this way different versions of community are produced and worked with by the participants. In extract (3) also we find two different bases for being a community are offered.

#### Extract 3

**Chinese L.S. M.W. S1**

1 Q for me definitely the Chinese community.

2 I would be your

- 3 **Q** I feel most comfortable.  
4 **I** That's what I'm asking.  
5 **Q** mm  
6 **I** Yah. So you would consider that as your main point of contact or moving  
7 with each other.  
8 **C** I think, I think, it goes back to the question earlier. It's because of the  
9 language doesn't mean we don't want to go out and make friends with other  
10 people just because we are a community.  
11 **Q** Yah, that's why I feel more comfortable among us. We talk in Chinese  
12 and feel free.

One of the participants says that partiality to the ethnic group is the basis for why they are a community, and another specifies shared language as the basis. Q specifies her community as the Chinese community (line 1) and then goes on to discuss her preference for this community. In line 3 Q talks of being comfortable with the Chinese community. Her statement suggests partiality to the Chinese group and at the same time implies that this feeling will not be present when she is with other groups. The interviewer affirms that this is the correct kind of answer and then goes on to ask further details about their interaction with the Chinese community. In lines 6-7 the interviewer asks the participants if the Chinese community is the 'main point of contact or moving with each other'. The interviewer's question has introduced further grounds for the Chinese community being Q's community namely, contact and moving with each other. The interviewer's question also does another thing. It suggests that the participants want to only interact with their ethnic group. Answering affirmatively to this question therefore has the possibility of the interviewer making an inference that they do not want to relate to others. The participants orient to this possibility and address it when they formulate their answer to the interviewer's question.

C a member of the group does this in a number of ways. C treats the interviewer's question as to whether the Chinese community is the preferred group of interaction as irrelevant. She does this by ignoring the current question and referring back to an earlier question before making her response. If the immediate question was responded to affirmatively then she would have to continue with partiality as the

basis for being a community. However referring back to an earlier point in the conversation allows her to introduce another basis for why they are a group, namely having a shared characteristic, language (lines 8-9). Moreover this explanation manages the connotation that they do not want to relate to others. So instead of talking about their interaction with the Chinese group C discusses being together as a group because they speak the same language. Moreover this explanation is commonly proffered and used in talk and therefore has the possibility of being readily accepted by the listener. A further advantage of referring back is that it reminds the interviewer that this issue has already been discussed and a conclusion reached. What this does is to point out to the interviewer that it is not useful therefore to continue discussing partiality as a basis for being a group. It also reinforces that the explanation that they exist as group because of shared language should be considered as the correct one. Finally C explicitly states that specifying community on the basis of ethnicity does not imply that they do not want to relate to others (lines 9-10). After C has finished speaking Q draws on C's explanation to add to her prior explanation for being a group. She says 'that's why I feel more comfortable among us we talk in Chinese and feel free' (lines 11-12). So in this way the participants work with each other's explanations to create a suitable explanation for their being a group.

From the analysis of extracts (1) and (2) and (3) we have identified a number of ways in which community is constructed, as a religious community, as a much broader ethnic community, and as existing on the basis of shared characteristics or as existing on account of partiality to those from their ethnic or religious group. We discussed that certain ways of constructing community such as on the basis of partiality was problematic. When such accounting was done what we observed was that the participants managed the implications by providing an alternative basis for existing as a community, namely shared characteristics.

## CREATING COMMUNITY BOUNDARIES

In the earlier section our focus was on how participants accounted for their existence as a community. Cohen (1985) suggests that the use of the word community implies the following: that members of the group share something in common and that members belonging to a community are distinguished from other such groups. So Cohen says that community at the same time means both similarity and difference. In extracts (1), (2) and (3) when participants discussed the bases for being a community they also made distinctions between their community and other groups. Participants make these distinctions through using a number of strategies.

(From extract 1)

- 4 I think the right people to me are my friends we can be good friends,  
5 but somehow I couldn't say the word my community.

(From extract 2)

- 12 Y I have got two or three very nice Scottish people but when I join my  
13 I group  
14 Y from Pakistan I like it's a different

(From extract 3)

- 8 C I think, I think, it goes back to the question earlier. It's because of the  
9 language doesn't mean we don't want to go out and make friends with other  
10 people just because we are a community.

In all three extracts we find that the respondents make reference to the existence of other groups. Thus the participants talk of 'friends' (extract 1), 'nice Scottish people' (extract 2) and 'other people' (extract 3). The participants' specifying of the presence of other groups suggests that they do not consider them the same as their community. In this way participants make a distinction between their community and the other groups of people. However the distinction is created in such a way that it avoids an 'us' and 'them' situation. Participants do this by describing others as those not



opposed to them but as people they interact with, as those they are friendly with or as those they would like to be friends with. In this way 'Community' and 'others' are portrayed as two different groups of people that they interact with but not as if they are in rigid opposition. Moreover the words 'friend' and 'nice people' also present the relationship with the other groups in a positive way. A further consequence of discussing their interaction with other groups is the dispelling of any connotation that they do not want to relate to others because they are a community. So while a boundary is created it still does not present them as being exclusive.

It is after the construction of such a diffuse boundary that the respondents then go on to discount that these other groups cannot be community. In extract (1) the participant, without explicitly stating that the other group is not community, simply says that she can't label them as community. In line 5 she says that she can't 'use the word community'. In extract (2) the participant refers to being with her group as different. So although a comparison is made it is done in a nice way. In extract (3) the participants, by stating they are together as a group because of shared language, allows it to be inferred that on that basis others can't be community. So by stating what is community and what it is not meaning of community is established. What we observed is that when community boundaries were created the negative implications of such constructions were simultaneously managed by the participants. There were also other ways in which participants managed the implications of drawing community boundaries in terms of ethnicity or religion. This is precisely what we see in the next extract. The participant draws on personal ability and preferences to overcome the negative implications of belonging to a community specified on the basis of religion and culture.

#### Extract 4

##### **Pakistani H.S. M.W. group**

- 1 I What would you say about community,
- 2 I mean if you talk of community itself,
- 3 would that mean anything to you? or

4 S Oh primarily because of my religion and culture,  
5 and then I have advantages in that I can communicate with both cultures,  
6 and I find that I like both things.  
7 And I have learnt over the years that it's advantageous to keep an open mind  
8 to everybody and other people as well.  
9 And working with other people, mainly the Scottish community,  
10 my you get respected for that!  
11 But you also have to put up with prejudices  
12 from both sides and you have to ((lots of noise from creche))

S defines community as religion and culture. So what we find is that the community boundary is well-defined. Creating boundaries in this way is problematic because others can make negative inferences about the individuals. That S treats her specifying of community in terms of religion and culture as problematic is evident when we analyse S's account further.

Having specified basis for being a community as religion and culture, S uses a three part list (Jefferson, 1991) to describe her relationship to both cultures and the benefits of the relationship (lines 5-7). She says that she 'communicates with both cultures', 'she likes both things' and she 'has learnt over the years that it is advantageous to keep an open mind to everybody and other people as well'. The last statement in the list is about having an open mind to 'everybody' and 'other people'. 'Everybody' should include 'other people', so why mention 'other people' at all? Talking about the presence of other people suggests a group boundary. However by saying that there should be openness to these other people too the implications of exclusivity is avoided. It is only after talking about the positive interactions individuals should have with other people that S specifies who they are, namely the Scottish community.

S's account of how she interacts with other communities softens the rigidity of the group boundaries as portrayed by her specifying community in terms of religion and culture. However a boundary is maintained by ensuring that interaction with others does not implicate her belonging to other communities. Her list only highlights her ability to communicate with more than one culture, her preference for

relating to both cultures and the benefits of relating in this way. Moreover talking about personal abilities enables S to do some character building work for herself.

Analysing the above extracts we find that community boundaries are created and maintained by making a distinction between the participants' group and other groups. However the community boundaries are shown to be flexible by the participants' claim of maintaining relationships with other groups.

### **QUESTIONING ETHNICITY AS A RELEVANT BASIS FOR COMMUNITY**

Earlier when respondents specified community in terms of religion and ethnicity particular features of the community were made relevant to claim why it existed as a community. Further it was on the same basis that distinctions were made between them and others. However there were a number of accounts where such an understanding was questioned. Participants argued that sharing the same ethnicity did not necessarily mean sharing in commonalities. In the following section participants point out how groups formed on the basis of ethnicity do not match their concept of community.

#### **Extract 5**

##### **African.L.S. M.W. S1**

- 1 S aha. I mean, here (.), here the community you can't really define or think of  
2 community the same way as you think of it at home. At home it is really  
3 together-knit, but here there are always gaps.  
4 I ahm  
5 S I mean  
6 I yes  
7 S It is not the same  
8 I a ha  
9 S So here I can't even think of what community, I don't think of community in  
10 this place now.  
11 I So where is home then? and  
12 S Home is in Kenya.  
13 I Kenya?  
14 S ahm  
15 I So that's, So if you had fellow Kenyans here they would be your community  
16 then?  
17 S They would be my community, but they are again, they are here too, some are  
18 here, but it's not really

- 19 **I** in that way.  
 20 **S** No not really in that way. And it's when you really, it's where you really feel  
 21 the atmosphere of community and meaningful word of community, that's  
 22 really very meaningful.  
 23 **I** Back home.  
 24 **S** Back home, to have a community, because you get involved in a community,  
 25 but here it seems that the time factor is really important, and so here with the  
 26 work and the lifestyle  
 27 **I** getting together is not  
 28 **S** is that difficult

#### Extract 6

#### **Pakistani H.S. MW.S1**

- 1 **L** I think the way it is in your own country.  
 2 The community was where you were,  
 3 that, particular group of people, and you used to relate to them directly,  
 4 **I** That's what  
 5 **L** and they were compatible,  
 6 not always but they were.  
 7 So you could relate to them. They were on the same wavelength.  
 8 You didn't have to explain to them.  
 9 Over here there is no concept as such.  
 10 people have come from every walk of life.  
 11 Just because they are Asians or Pakistanis they form groups  
 12 but not necessarily they are on the same wavelength or same things  
 13 and that's not bad or anything.  
 14 As I was saying, last three years I have started knowing people more Asians,  
 15 because before that I lived in Longenry, so miles away.  
 16 I didn't know anybody.  
 17 Then moved to Annandale Street  
 18 Now there are a lot of Asians coming, mixing,  
 19 and but community as such doesn't really matter.

In extracts (5) and (6) the respondents provide a description of what should be considered as an authentic community. Their description is based on the concept of community in their country of origin. In extract (5) community is described as something where members are closely connected (line 3), involved with each other (line 24) and where community actually means something. In lines 20-21 the participant discusses community as where she feels 'the atmosphere and meaningful word of community'. What is portrayed by her description is a community where members identify with each other at the level of feeling, the relational level and at a

participatory level. A community is one which fosters a sense of belonging and identity. The kind of closeness suggested in her account resonates with the territorial communities described by Butcher (1993). Here individuals share a common geographical location and are closely interrelated either through kinship networks or through other links resulting in a high level of interaction among them. So in this way community is defined on the basis of belongingness and involvement. We also identify similar things in extract (6). L's description of the community in her country of origin addresses the emotional and interactional part of community life. L says that community consists of a group of people who have a shared understanding. She argues that community members should be compatible, be on the same wavelength and capable of understanding things without needing her to explain things to them (lines 1-7). She does modify her account by specifying that sometimes such shared understanding may be absent (line 6). She however discounts its significance by specifying that there were those who fitted her concept of community. What modifying her account also does is to dispel any challenges from her listeners that she was making an over-generalisation.

Each of the participants now proceeds to provide another basis for the existence of community, namely ethnicity. They begin to discount it in favour of their earlier authentic version. The reasons for discounting is pointed out as a lack in the ethnic community, namely not functioning in the same way as specified by them. The ethnic community does not match with their description of authentic community. Thus in extract (6) L, after specifying ethnicity as the second basis for existing as a community, proceeds to discount it. L, while pointing out that the group referred to is based on ethnicity, constructs it as a disparate group. In line 10 L says that the individuals who form this group come from 'all walks of life'. That this disparate group has no shared understanding is reinforced by two things she says. She argues that this community has gaps (line 3). Further in line 12 she states that the sharing of



ethnicity does not mean that the members are 'on the same wavelength'. Her construction of groups on the basis of ethnicity as disparate produces a contrast between this group and community on the basis of shared understanding. This contrast enables discounting community on the basis of ethnicity as the real thing. In extract (5) the participant does not immediately come up with a different definition of community. However the interviewer, orienting to the fact that S should have a community based on ethnicity, asks her if she would consider fellow Kenyans in Edinburgh as community. In the following turn S seemingly agrees but then says that it is not really community (lines 17-18). She discusses that in Britain the work and lifestyle makes it difficult for individuals to be involved with each other (lines 25-28). Once again as in extract (6) we find that her explanation contrasts with her earlier description of community, namely community in terms of involvement and atmosphere. This comparison encourages the listener to conclude that community in Britain is not authentic. In this way both participants discount the existence of an authentic community in Britain. In extract (5) S explicitly states in line 9 that she 'doesn't think of community in this place now'. In extract (6) the participant states that 'community as such doesn't really matter'.

Further in extract (6) the potential offensiveness caused by discounting community on the basis of ethnicity as authentic is managed by the participant in a number of ways. She downplays her prejudice by stating that she is not making a negative evaluation of individuals coming together on the basis of ethnicity. She says in line 13 it is not 'bad or anything'. She further explains that her present situation is different and so she relates to Asians (line 14). Her earlier non-interaction is portrayed as the result of circumstances, namely lack of Asians in her earlier neighbourhood (lines 15-18). What is accomplished by her accounting in this way is that although she considers community 'back home' as the real thing she has not excluded herself from members of her ethnic group in Britain. However her

current relationship with other Asians still fits in with her earlier definition of community. Her account is only about interaction, it does not imply that they are community.

In the next extract F outlines the characteristics of an ideal community. She then discounts the relevance of existing communities for her because they do not possess it. In line 14 F says that the ideal community should be a supportive environment. She uses the words 'warm and caring' to construct her description of this ideal community.

#### Extract 7

##### **Pakistani. H.S. M.W.S1**

- 1 **I** There seems to be so much coming about,  
2 attitudes of the community and everything.  
3 Who would you, for each of you, would you, think is your community?  
4 **F** Give this lady a chance ((to R)), give this lady a chance  
((laughter))  
5 **R** I don't, I don't think I have allegiance with any community.  
6 I don't feel I am part of the white or or any community.  
7 I think my my network is, as I say, an extended family,  
8 and that's what I feel is my community, is my close friends  
9 and parts of my family.  
10 I don't feel I feel part of the Pakistani community or  
11 part of the the Scottish community.  
12 The whole concept of community, it's, it's false you know.  
13 You kind of build this notion of community:  
14 being warm and welcoming place for everyone -  
15 when in reality you have to create your own alternatives.

F in her account specifies existing communities as the Pakistani community and Scottish community. She uses their inability to meet the requirements of her ideal concept of community to discount their relevance to her. She points out in line 5 that she has no allegiance to any community. As she explicitly states, the 'whole concept of community is false' (line 12). If F just argued that she did not want to belong to any community it has the potential of her being seen as not wanting to relate to others and so on. So explaining about the lack in existing communities is a

way of managing such inferences.

Having discounted the relevance of existing communities for her F then proceeds to define what community means to her by formulating an alternative community. She describes her alternative community as a 'network' (lines 7-9). Network immediately suggests a much looser structure in contrast to community specified on the basis of ethnicity. The use of the word 'network' further allows for the possibility of including different groups of people. Thus when F describes her network she says that it is an extended family. She further specifies that this includes close friends and parts of her family. Moreover F's description of network as including those close to her can be argued to fit her notion of community, namely a group whose members are close and caring. So in this way 'network' is portrayed as pointing to the real thing. However formulation of the alternative community is not made to exclude her ethnic group. F's defining network as family suggests the presence of a link with her ethnic group.

In all the three extracts in this section community is constructed on the basis of involvement, interaction, warmth and caring in contrast to sharing commonalities on the basis of ethnicity. The use of contrasts is a conversation device where the preferability of one item is exposed and made easily available through the contrast (Atkinson, 1994).

## **INTERACTION AS THE BASIS OF COMMUNITY**

So far we have noted that when participants were asked to specify community, they often did so on the basis of ethnicity/religion/culture. Moreover participants were oriented to the expectation that this was generally what they were expected to talk about when discussing community. Thus in the last section we pointed out that when participants formulated other versions of community they did so by discounting community on the basis of ethnicity. Moreover once community was specified

participants were expected to interact with that group and share a close relationship with members of the group in contrast to other groups. In the following extract the participant is oriented to such an expectation. She is oriented to the expectation that because she is an Indian she is expected to belong to that community and to interact with it. The participant finds this problematic since her ethnic group and the group she interacts with are different. Analysis of the extract helps us to understand how A manages this difficulty.

#### Extract 8

#### Indian H.S. S. S1

- 1     **I**     So who would you say, I mean, this is slightly changing the topic,  
2           who would you say is your community?  
3     **A**     That is a difficult one.  
4     **I**     mm.  
5     **A**     That is difficult. Ahm, it depends in what context I see.  
6     **I**     okay  
7     **A**     I see, sort of, mm, it is difficult.  
8     **I**     I mean it doesn't matter. You might define in different  
9           ways. So I am not looking for any particular answer.  
10    **A**     Right  
11    **I**     Yah. ((A and I: slight laughter))  
12           I am just looking for what you are ((laughter again))  
13    **A**     It is difficult because my friends are, I have to say,  
14           I think bar two or three, are, all British.  
15    **I**     mm  
16    **A**     Purely because, that's in the (place where they live)  
17           we are the only Asians  
18    **I**     okay  
19    **A**     Not now. There was one other Asian family two years ago.  
20           But we have been there since I was three.  
21    **I**     mmm  
22    **A**     So for twenty, over twenty years ago we were the only Asians  
23    **I**     Okay.  
24    **A**     So that was one reason, and the other reason the jobs I have been in.  
25           It's strange, I don't why, I don't know why in finance or investments  
26           not only males but there is no Asian women.  
27           There is no Asian males or women.  
28    **I**     mm  
29    **A**     It's, it's very odd. I find that very strange.  
30           Ahm, because I am sure lots would sort of like the job I am doing.  
31    **I**     mm

32 A I think, there is a, seems to be a trend towards being doctors  
 33 dentists ((A and I: slight laughter))  
 34 Oh everybody I know anyway is a doctor or a dentist.  
 35 So I think from that viewpoint my friends are British  
 36 I mm  
 37 A Apart from a couple which are a, Indian, so I see that, as they are  
 38 but I am very sort of I think I am Indian, although I was born here  
 39 I've got very deep sort of roots.  
 40 I mm  
 41 A which is why sometimes I get, I get, annoyed at the community,  
 42 I mm  
 43 A the Indian community because maybe I do feel too:: sort of  
 44 passionate about the way they run some things.  
 45 I Okay  
 46 A So since, though for my friendship I do feel that for but I think  
 47 even though I was born in Scotland, I do, I am very strong  
 48 about being Indian.  
 49 I mm  
 50 A Very much so. Ahm, which is strange because I have never been there  
 51 So I sent  
 52 I Okay ((I's laughter, followed by A's))  
 53 A I am going there next month.  
 54 I a ha ((slight laughter))  
 55 A From that viewpoint I do, and you know, to this extent with my  
 56 friends I have taken my friends who have tried on all mum's  
 57 sarees and and we are sort of involved in sports councils and things  
 58 like that. But a lot of the time, I think this is too frustrating.  
 59 I mm  
 60 A I find a, this is awful, but I think sometimes the mentality  
 61 of a lot of the community is very frustrating.  
 62 I mm  
 63 A Ahm, and sometimes I just, you know, and you know to the point  
 64 when I think I'll have nothing to do with this.  
 65 I mm  
 66 A But then two weeks later, I come back to (I: laughter). My mum will  
 67 say like, we are going through to Glasgow, do you want to come? We  
 68 will go, you know. So it's a difficult one.  
 69

A has difficulty in complying with the expectations that community should be defined on the basis of interaction. She states in lines 3, 5 and 7 that she is facing difficulties with defining community. Having informed the interviewer that the interviewer's question has posed a problem for her, A proceeds to offer an explanation for why specifying community is problematic. A begins by stating that her difficulty arises because her interaction is mostly with the white community



(lines 13-14). However openly stating that on the basis of interaction her community is white will be problematic. It has the potential for A being considered as rejecting her ethnic group. The potential inferences are managed in different ways.

First, A provides two accounts which justify why she has British friends. Both the accounts come up with the explanation that interaction with the white community was the result of circumstances. She argues that she interacted mainly with the white community because there were no Asians to interact with. A's first account in lines 16-22, describes the absence of Asian families in the place where they live. She says we are the 'only Asians'. Her description makes what she is stating appear extreme. Potter (1996) has pointed out that descriptions can manipulate quantity to make something seem extreme or minimal or to build something as good or bad. In this case A uses this to support her specifying that she has mostly white friends. Moreover she provides additional information about the length of time they have lived in the area (lines 20-22). The information that her family have lived in the area for a long period of time reinforces that this has been her circumstances for a number of years. However her claim that they are the only Asians living in a particular area could be challenged. This could undermine the credibility of her account. This is managed by pointing out a single exception to the case, namely the recent arrival of one Asian family. Pointing out that this is only an exception and also that this was a recent event has the further benefit of informing the interviewer that this will not make a significant difference to A's claim that she lacks the opportunities to interact with the Asian community.

In her second account A discusses the absence of Asians in her profession as a warrant for having more white friends. A uses words such as 'odd' and 'strange' (lines 25 and 29) to formulate the absence of Asians as a puzzle. Producing the puzzle offers A an opportunity to offer an explanation to the puzzle. In lines 32 -34 she goes on to explain that the absence of Asians in finance is because they choose

other professions such as doctors or dentists. Further suggesting that her argument is contingent on her personal knowledge (lines 32 and 34) manages the possibility of the credibility of her account being questioned. It allows for the possibility that other explanations can be there for absence of Asians. Her account also raises another problem. Formulating that others chose to be a doctor or dentist could mean that finance is not a good profession to be in. This is managed by providing her explanation of others' choice in a slightly sarcastic humorous way. In line 32 A talks of a 'trend' towards becoming doctors or engineers. The slight laughter shared by A and the interviewer after A's explanation suggests that her formulation has had the desired effect. The word 'trend' also works towards suggesting that the others are just following what everyone else is doing in contrast to making a proper choice. Thus the two accounts not only manage to explain why A's community in terms of interaction is white but also manage the potential implications of such an interaction.

Another way in which A manages the implications of relating mainly to the white community is to point out that she does have a relationship with her ethnic community. However the relationship is formulated in such a way that it does not conflict with her earlier specifying community in terms of interaction as white. This is done by formulating her interaction with her ethnic community as flexible. She argues that she sometimes chooses to interact and at other times not with the Indian community (lines 41-44, 57-65 and 67 -69). Her formulation differs from the usual expectation that individuals should interact with members of their ethnic group because they share the same ethnicity. The third way in which implications of relating to the white community is addressed is by arguing that she has an Indian identity. However her Indian identity is constructed as something internal and also as unique to her and not something which is a given on the basis of belonging to the Indian community. The genuineness of her Indianness is displayed by saying a number of things which attest to the strength of her Indian identity. Thus she talks of

having deep roots (line 39), as having strong feelings about the Indian community's functioning (lines 43-44), and possessing this Indianess inspite of having British friends, being born in Scotland and not having been to India (lines 46-48, 50). She reinforces her feelings about being an Indian by stating how she introduces her friends to the Indian culture.

What A's account of the difficulty with defining community does is to address the expectation that just because of her ethnicity, she needs to belong to an ethnic community, to interact with it, and to have her identity determined by it. Her account suggests that she doesn't interact with her ethnic community in the way that is expected. However she discussed that this doesn't mean she doesn't have an ethnic identity. Her ethnic identity is portrayed as separate from the Indian community. It is also distinct from her interaction with white friends. What is interesting is also that ethnic community, white friends as the interactive community and ethnic identity are all constructed as three separate things and having different meanings for her. Further her formulation of the three aspects does not portray any conflict of having to choose between them. For A the difficulty is not with her having all these relationships but with the expectation that community has to mean one thing.

In the next extract the participant explicitly states that she has many communities. She then goes on to list the different communities that she is part of.

#### Extract 9

##### **Pakistani Single H.S.S.S1**

- 1 **I** Who would you say is your community?  
2 **H** Oh, this especially is about what you asked a wee while ago, that, this  
3 this sort of like  
4 **I** ha ha  
5 **H** You know, I have many communities.  
6 **I** mm  
7 **H** I don't think I have one.  
8 **I** okay  
9 **H** Ahm, I have a, I have obviously my community in terms of a, who my family  
10 from, who my family are

11 **I** mm  
 12 **H** and so, that means quite strongly I tend to sort of say South Asian  
 13 **I** mm  
 14 **H** communities in particular, Pakistani Muslims, which is where my  
 15 background is. Also amongst black and white, anti-racist  
 16 **I** mm  
 17 **H** but also amongst women's organisations and groups. A lot of contacts with  
 18 like a others' struggles, like lesbian and gay women and etcetera, and people  
 19 with disability, and so I have a very strong political community.  
 20 **I** yah  
 21 **H** I have my own community in terms of where I am from  
 22 **I** yah  
 23 **H** family-ly. Then I have my peer group as a community, that's the global one,  
 24 across the world. But we are a generation of people who were born and  
 25 brought up in Britain at a time when there weren't many of us in schools, at a  
 26 time when education didn't respond to our needs.  
 27 **I** mm  
 28 **H** No part of society responded to our needs, to our parents' needs, or to our  
 29 younger siblings', older siblings' needs. And therefore it was very isolating  
 30 **I** mm  
 31 **H** experience, growing up in that sort of environment, where if you questioned,  
 32 both sides of the hushed you up. Your parents didn't want you question,  
 33 because they didn't want you to raise your head  
 34 **I** yah  
 35 **H** and be identified as trouble-makers  
 36 **I** mm  
 37 **H** White communities didn't want you to question because they didn't want you  
 38 made aware of those issues or see those things as problems. They just wanted  
 39 to treat us all the same. And so it is interesting, because I too, this  
 40 incredible, incredibly active, very radical phase, like passionate community  
 41 of people my age, and I mean, I mean, and you have seen a generation of  
 42 young blood people grow, who are not basically going to take the crap that  
 43 their parents had to take and that they expect us to take. So I see that as my  
 44 community as well. Yah, very much so

H says that her communities are, her ethnic community (lines 1-14), political community (lines 15-19) and peer group (lines 23-44). The first two definitions of community fit in with existing notions of community and H does not elaborate on them. However she elaborates about her peer group as constituting a community. H does not explicitly mention the identity of this peer group but allows it to be inferred that it is a group of black young people. This is done by pointing out the limited numbers of this group present in school (lines 24-25). H then mentions through using

a three part-list (lines 28-29) the neglect they faced from others of society. The consequence of this neglect, namely isolation is also explicitly stated. Finally, the group is portrayed as separate by pointing out the that they are distinct from the white community and from her parents' generation. In lines 32-35 H mentions the attitude of her parents generation to such treatment. She argues that parents did not want the young people to question the way in which they were differently treated by society. In lines 37-39 the attitude of the white community and their reluctance to view the problems of this group is formulated. In contrast to these two groups we have the third group of young people who question the treatment of society and stand up for their rights. H explicitly states in line 42 that this group was not going to take 'any crap' like their parents' generation. Formulating this group as separate and talking about the function of the group suggests that this is a group of black young people. So in this way the ethnicity of this group is made relevant. So for H interaction in different ways is presented as the basis for particular groups becoming community for her. At the same time the expectation of the interviewer is also addressed by specifying one of the communities as her ethnic community and making ethnicity relevant in her portrayal of her peer group.

**COMMUNITY - BASIS OF IDENTITY**

One of the main consequences of being part of a community is argued to be its contribution to individuals' identity. In the following extract the speaker is oriented to the fact that her Chinese ethnicity is considered to be the basis for her identity. The speaker in her accounting questions this understanding.

Extract 10  
**Chinese H.S.M.W. S1**

- 1. I It's a very difficult thing talking about community, and how you build you
- 2 community, it is not one thing each person. Is that your experience? Or would
- 3 you say, who would you say as your community, or



(a number of turns later and after another women had addressed the question)

- 4 S I I always make sure when I go to any meeting that I make people understand  
5 that I don't represent the Chinese community at all, you know. I think that's  
6 what they always assume: there's a Chinese there, that's represented  
7 I will say that I only represent people that I work with because they're  
8 the one that actually paid my hours there ((*laughter*)). So I think,  
9 I think, for me growing up in this country did resent. I really  
10 resented to be Chinese you know even though I'm not from  
11 mixed parentage. Both my parents were Chinese but  
12 because it was such a negative attitude being people with, people being  
13 different you know, I wanted to be seen as white. But then also I wasn't and  
14 I'm not going to be. I don't ((*group laughter* )) I don't know how I was trying  
15 to be white. ((*group laughter*)) It's just like I was, I didn't like people telling  
16 me I was Chinese. No I would say I'm Scottish, but then I remember I wasn't  
17 born here you know. I was born in Hong Kong. So I keep saying Scottish I  
18 think it was when my son came along ((*softly*)) and then, then I got a job in  
19 the Chinese elderly. Then ah I made a point of improving my Cantonese. I  
20 had to anyway because of the job, and also trying to, you know, feel good  
21 about my own identity because if I don't feel good about my own identity my  
22 son is not going to respect  
23 A exactly  
24 S half of what he is, you know, in some way, I was, I mean, you know, we  
25 always play this game like you know, ah is D Chinese yes is mummy  
26 Chinese?  
27 yes is D's daddy Chinese? No  
28 ((*group laughter* ))  
29 S I'll make him feel negative ((*laughter*)) I'm sure by the time he understands it  
30 more he'll like oh what do you mean Chinese?  
31 ((*group laughter*))

S in her account produces a contrast between two ways of accounting for identity. Through the contrast she portrays which type of accounting is relevant for her. First she points out that identity is assumed by others on the basis of belonging to an ethnic group. She talks of two contexts where such assumptions were made. The first is her work context where she is assumed to represent the Chinese community because she belongs to it (lines 4-8). The second is the context of growing up where others would define her as Chinese (lines 13-15). She talks of how she was denied defining herself on her terms. Having providing examples of others defining her identity, S then talks of how she therefore rejected her Chinese identity in favour of other identities. Thus in her work situation she chooses her occupational identity. When growing up she chose white, Scottish identity. The implications of making

such choices is managed by her earlier explanation of others imposing their views on her. It is also managed by providing a further reason for resenting being Chinese. In lines 11-12 S discusses the prejudiced attitudes of others because she was different. Both the reasons ensure that S's listeners would be sympathetic to her reacting in this way. Further when talking about wanting to be white, S discounts the relevance of wanting to be white by portraying her desire as humorous and incredulous. In lines 14 and 15 S says 'I don't know how I was trying to be white'. In lines 16 and 17 she further adds 'I would say I'm Scottish' but 'I remember I wasn't born here', 'I was born in Hong Kong'. Her accounting in this humorous way is shared by the group because they laugh at the statements that she makes.

S then goes on to produce the second account of identity. She discusses how a Chinese identity can be developed on the individual's terms. S talks of how she chose to acknowledge her Chinese identity when she wanted to. Thus S began to think about her identity when she had a baby (line 18) and when she started to work with the Chinese elderly (line 19). A relevant feature of S's account is that it portrays S as developing a Chinese identity on her own terms in contrast to being defined and treated as Chinese by others.

## **FORMULATING COMMUNITIES**

Analyses of participants' accounts has pointed out the different ways in which community was specified. Thus participants defined community as ethnic, religious, political, as a territorial community (community 'back home') and as a network. The basis for existing as a community was also specified in different ways. Participants explained that community came to exist because of shared characteristics, opportunities for interaction and involvement, partiality to the ingroup and because of shared experience. So in this way different formulations of communities were made in the participants' accounts.

Often as in extracts (1), (2) and (3) participants warranted for existing as a community on the basis of shared characteristics. By drawing on one or more of the following namely, shared ways of thinking, shared values, shared habits and as having the same religion and language, community was constructed as something which 'really exists'. In other words the construction resulted in making the community appear as solid and real. Recent conceptualisations of ethnic, religious and political communities have described them very much along the lines of the descriptions given by the participants. However treating what the participants say as standing in for the real thing is precisely the kind of thing that the turn to seeing language as constructive argues against. So instead of considering the participants' construction of community as standing in for a real thing it is useful to consider the purposes for which different versions of community are constructed in the accounts. Constructing community as solid and real has the function of enabling individuals to think of the existence of the community with ideological integrity. Cohen (1985) has argued that communities are not to be considered in the structural-functional sense but as something which is created by individuals thinking themselves to be part of a particular group. So in other words the existence of the community is symbolic. The symbolic construction serves the function of 'making real' community's existence for the participants.

Another function of drawing on shared characteristics as the basis for existing as a community is addressing the negative connotations of specifying community in terms of religion and ethnicity. Shared characteristics specifies that there is some commonality without carrying the associated negative inferences of categorisations such as religion or ethnicity. A feature of current British context is making negative evaluations of individuals on the basis of ethnicity and religion by the dominant members of society. Studies in health and social services have pointed to the assumptions made about individuals on the basis of their ethnicity (Cameron *et al.*

1989, Ahmad *et al.* 1991). Brah (1994) also discusses the kinds of category inferences which are made about belonging to a particular ethnic group. She provides an example of the stereotypes which prevail in relation to Asian women, namely that they are a submissive product of patriarchal society. On the other hand talking of shared characteristics or features is something which is available in current discourse and which is also accepted as a valid reason for existence of communities. So this adds to the acceptability of formulating community on this basis. That shared characteristics is a reasonable explanation for existing as a community is also made available from analyses of extracts (2) and (3). We find that participants preferred this version to other versions, such as partiality as a basis for existing as a group. So in this way construction of community as solid and real on the basis of shared characteristics became a pragmatic resource which individuals drew on to use in talk.

### **FLEXIBLE CONSTRUCTION OF BOUNDARIES**

We had discussed in the earlier section that shared characteristics downplay the negative connotations of specifying community on the basis of ethnicity and religion and was also used by the participants as a reasonable explanation in contrast to other explanations. However from our participants' accounts we understand that shared characteristics alone was not considered an adequate explanation for overcoming the issue of exclusivity or partiality to their own group. This is because the resulting portrayal of community as solid and real using shared characteristics, albeit in a symbolic way, still draws certain boundaries between the groups. The 'us' and 'them' situation continues to be maintained. In this way some sort of opposition continues to exist. Participants were oriented to this and they addressed it in their accounting. In the participants' accounts we observe that they spoke of interacting and having relationships with other groups. Moreover the relationship was described in a specific way, namely friends. Naming the other group as friends blurred the rigid

boundaries between the groups. This meant that the 'us' and 'them' situation was downplayed. In this way group boundaries were made flexible.

Potter and Reicher (1987) illustrate how group boundaries are formulated in response to the needs of interaction by analysing accounts of 'St Paul's riot' which took place in Bristol in 1980. In this riot fighting took place between police and black youths for a number of hours. According to Potter and Reicher (1987) one set of accounts of the event depicted the problem as something between the police and the black community. This presented it as conflict between two distinct groups. Another group of accounts depicted the problems as a 'community relations problem'. In the latter set of accounts depicting the problem as one of 'community relations' had the function of depicting the police as part of the community. So instead of it being two groups the way community was constructed represented all concerned as belonging to the same group. According to Potter and Reicher (1987) each of these constructions served different functions. The first set of accounts depicting the conflict as intergroup struggle, allowed not only for placing the blame on the police force but also advocated the solution as curbing of the repressive police force. The second set of accounts by depicting everyone as part of the same community absolves placing the blame on any particular section of the society. The solution therefore advocated here was community policing and building trust between individuals. So in this way group boundaries are portrayed as flexible and not fixed.

There were also other ways by which the rigidity of group boundaries were softened in our participants' accounts. Participants spoke of being part of other groups such as the white community, disabled groups and women's groups. One of our reasons for choosing to discuss community instead of directly discussing membership of the minority group was because we wanted participants to talk about different bases for existing as a group apart from ethnicity. So what we begin to see is that belonging is not necessarily fixed to a particular group. Participants' accounts



portrayed them as transcending group boundaries and moving into other groups. Moreover in a number of accounts participants oriented to the fact that community should be defined on the basis of ethnicity but responded by pointing out the difficulties with the expectation. In extracts (5), (6) and (7) participants argued that groups sharing the same ethnicity did not necessarily constitute community. In these extracts the genuine basis for existence as a community was suggested to be the nature of community, namely warmth, caring, atmosphere and so on rather than shared symbols. So this meant that participants could define other groups which exhibited these characteristics as community. This results in dismantling the notion of community as something defined by only by ethnicity.

Traditional conceptualisations of minorities and majorities have always been formulated as dichotomous. Social identity theory, assimilation and acculturation approaches and black identity formation theory all subscribe to such dichotomy. It is based on this dichotomy that the theories then attempt to understand ethnic identity. As Phinney (1990) argues ethnic identity is meaningful only in situations in which two or more racial groups are in contact over time. But the analyses of the participants' accounts indicate that group boundaries are constructed to avoid such sharp distinctions such as black versus white. Moreover their accounts further suggest relating to the other people as something which happens along with their being part of their community. One possible explanation is that the theoretical formulations were made at a much earlier time when minorities were a fairly new phenomenon. With the current focus and public awareness of multiculturalism and with more minorities seeing themselves as British and also wanting to be considered British new ways of understanding the 'us' and 'them' situation are beginning to take root. The consequence of which is that theory should also begin to take new directions. The participants' accounts are possibly a starting point for the direction theoretical formulations of minorities and majorities should take.

Finally, inspite of the participants' questioning of ethnicity as the only basis for belonging to a community they did not discount the relevance of their ethnic community. In most of the above extracts participants portrayed ways in which they continued to relate to their ethnic group. What these participants were opposed to was conceding to a notion of community in the integrating sense where their individuality was lost. Participants wanted to be part of ethnic communities on their own terms and not in the way meanings were assigned to such memberships by others. An example of this is the way in which participants in extracts (8) and (10) spoke about ethnic identity as separate to minority group membership.

## CONCLUSION

The focus of this chapter has been on the way in which the participants discussed the meanings of community. From the findings of our analyses we argue that discussion of community did address issues of membership of the minority group. We discussed how the functions of community, namely offering individuals a sense of belonging, separating them from others and providing them with an identity were constructed in the participants' accounts. Moreover participants in their accounting displayed the kinds of concerns raised by academics regarding the changing nature of communities. Therefore participants in their accounts formulated communities and community boundaries in a flexible manner. Their formulations addressed the changes in society and at the same time maintained existing understandings of community in ways which did not become restrictive or dictative.

In the next Chapter we focus on another component of ethnic identity, namely aspects of culture of the minority communities.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The abbreviations used in the extract heading are as follows: H.S= High Status Work, M.W= Married Women, S1= Session 1. Other abbreviations which will be used are L.S = Low Status Work, S= Single Women and S2= Session 2.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **IMPORTANCE OF ASPECTS OF CULTURE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In the last chapter we discussed that some of the participants provided having the same habits, religion, culture, language, beliefs as reasons for existing as a community. Giddens (1989) discusses that characteristics such as language, history, ancestry, religion, dress distinguishes one ethnic group from another. All these characteristics along with others are included under the broad umbrella culture. Since the aspects of culture form a basis for making distinctions between groups they are considered as components of ethnic identity. In this chapter we begin with a critical discussion of how aspects of culture have been treated within traditional theories to measure ethnic identity. We then proceed to consider how women formulate the meanings and importance of aspects of culture.

#### **ASPECTS OF CULTURE AND ETHNIC IDENTITY**

Shared aspects of culture has been argued to be a criteria for minority group membership. Therefore focusing on the involvement of individuals with the cultural practices and the social life of their ethnic group enables us to assess their ethnic identity (Phinney,1990). The most commonly assessed indicators of ethnic involvement are according to Phinney (1990), religion, friendship, social organisation, language, cultural traditions and politics. However as Phinney (1990) further points out religion and language have not been assessed in studies of ethnic identity of black people. An exception to this is the study of Asian-British women by Woollett *et al* (1994). Woollett *et. al.* have considered the importance of religion along with considering other aspects of culture such as social relationships, food, dress and marriage. Language however continues to remain neglected in studies of the ethnic identity of black people. The various aspects mentioned above are used in different combinations to measure what Phinney (1990) defines as: state of ethnic

identity. According to Phinney (1990) the state of ethnic identity is the person's ethnic identification at a given time. A further consequence of seeing such a direct relationship between culture and ethnic identity is that any change in the practice of aspects of culture would inevitably lead to a change in identity.

However this way of measuring ethnic identity throws up a number of problems. The direct relationship between ethnic identity and individuals' involvement in the aspects of culture has been questioned. Researchers like Hutnik (1986) and Woollett *et.al.* (1994) argue against seeing a direct relationship between practice of aspects of culture and ethnic identity. Hutnik says that change in customs or habits should be seen as separate from ethnic identification. Ethnic identification is defined by Hutnik as the way in which individuals label themselves as belonging to an ethnic category. In her empirical study the participants made the following ethnic identifications, namely Indian, British, Indian and British. Hutnik did not find a direct mapping between change in customs and habits and ethnic identification. Similarly Woollett *et. al.* (1994:124) in their study of Asian-British women found a lack of direct mapping between practice of religion and ethnic identity. The reason given by Woollett *et. al.* for this lack of direct mapping is that individuals interpret and practise religion in different ways. They therefore argue that this indicates a difficulty with measuring ethnic identity in terms of the degree of practising or upholding religious values.

Methodological problems have also been raised regarding the use of aspects of culture as indicators of ethnic identity. Phinney (1990) argues that in most cases the different studies used different aspects of culture to study ethnic identity. He therefore argues that it becomes problematic to make comparisons, creating a situation where reliability becomes an issue. He says that in the majority of studies reliability of measures were not reported or were so low as to raise questions about conclusions reached based on the measure.

Moreover culture's relationship to the identity of individuals also hinges on the premise that having shared aspects of culture is the basis for existing as a community or group which then forms the basis for the individuals' identity. In our previous chapter we found that participants' accounts provided other bases for existing as a community, suggesting that the role assigned to culture is not as straightforward as it has been portrayed to be. Finally, in many studies what aspects of culture are to be assessed is generally decided by the researcher. The drawback of such an approach is that certain aspects of culture which are not obvious to the researcher or have not been highlighted in the earlier studies could be missed out.

So the next obvious question is how are we going to understand aspects of culture in this study? From the above discussion what we are suggesting is that instead of assuming a specific relationship between culture and identity we should focus on what aspects of culture the participants themselves consider as important, how they formulate their importance and the kinds of issues which are made relevant for the participants in the process.

We therefore began by asking individuals which aspects of culture were important to them and why. The following are some of the aspects of culture which the respondents mentioned as important for them. They mentioned, religion, language, food, dress, values such as family values, respect for elders, contact with family members, marriage and women's rights as important for them. The following section will begin with analysing the different ways by which participants established the importance of these aspects of culture for their lives.

## **FORMULATING IMPORTANCE - DIFFERENTIATING MEANINGS**

When participants were asked which aspects of culture were important to them, they not only specified which aspects were important but also went on to elaborate why they considered them to be important. They used strategies such as making



distinctions between the different ways by which the aspect of culture could be understood and by discounting some ways in favour of others. In the following extract R makes a distinction between two ways of being a Muslim.

Extract 1

**Pakistani H.S.S.S2**

- 1 **I**     apart from that, what aspects of culture would you think are very important to  
2       keep or preserve or?  
3 **R**     Ahm, it's, it's very interesting question, because ahm, I, I'm Muslim by birth  
4 **I**     mm  
5 **R**     and it's part of my ethnicity and part of my cultural heritage, and to me that  
6       almost separate from it being part of my religious belief, if you know what I  
7       mean  
8 **I**     mm  
9 **R**     you know, so in that way I think, ahm, the types of, aspects of of one's culture  
10      or ethnic identity that are important come from knowing where you from and  
11      who you are and the background you are from. So they'll get that sense of  
12      their own history  
13 **I**     mm mm  
14 **R**     you know, Asian history, the history of struggles  
15 **I**     mm mm  
16 **R**     also of black people in this country, which then becomes part of all our  
17      histories

specifies that she is a Muslim by birth (line 3). She then proceeds to make a distinction between being a Muslim in terms of her ethnicity and cultural heritage and being a Muslim in terms of religious belief (lines 5-6). R then goes on to elaborate on how Muslim as a cultural heritage is important. In lines 10-12 R discusses the importance of individuals understanding their background and their roots. Generally the term 'Muslim' carries a religious connotation. It is R's orientation to this understanding that makes her distinguish between the different ways by which Muslim can be understood and also to elaborate on the notion of Muslim which is relevant for the particular conversation context. By doing this way in which Muslim as an aspect of culture should be understood is made clear.

In the following extracts the participants not only produced two ways of understanding the specified aspect of culture but went on to formulate which is the correct

I That is true. Okay, going on into the next thing, then, I mean going to culture, that is going a little away from work, into culture and aspects of culture, what for you would be the most important thing in your culture? to keep?

G Oh .. The most important thing in my culture to keep is good relationship between the family members. Because we do respect the family. And we do respect every member, individual, like : I am come from a Muslim culture.

I mm

G And beside the Islam where the Arab taboo says, "The woman is very respectable." Some people are think something else.

I mm

G But it's not. It's absolutely wrong. The woman is very respectable in the family, or amongst the family. And the man and the child, everybody individual

I respect

G respect. So I would like to keep this. And I would like my children to be able to understand these things and to practice it.

I mm. So that's the most important thing from

G That's the most important thing.

### Extract 3

#### African H.S.S.S2

1 I Ahm, going back to culture, what aspects of culture do you think are very  
2 important to you?

3 A Ahm, I want to say that family values are very important to me. My mother  
4 asked me to respect others, respect yourself, you know, and I have always  
5 believed in that. Maybe some people might say that's being proud or  
6 whatever. But I like to respect myself, and I respect other people. And I  
7 expect the same back.

8 I mm

9 A You know, I always say that I treat you the same way as I like to be treated.

10 You know, so to me that's one value that I find very important in my life.

In extract (2) G states that the important aspect of culture for her is to keep good relations between family members. She elaborates that this is to do with respecting everyone within the family (lines 5-6). So this is G's understanding of what the specified aspect of culture means to her. She then points out how the aspect of culture is understood by others. Their understanding is that not everyone is respected within the Muslim family. She says that some people think that women are not respected within the Muslim family (line 9). Similarly in extract (3) A specifies

family values as important and then elaborates on it. She says that it is about respecting yourself and others (line 4). She then proceeds to formulate how others may understand this. She argues that they may view her stating the importance of respecting yourself as a portrayal of proudness or it may have other negative implications (line 5). So in both extracts others' understanding is portrayed as being different and also as critical of their own formulation.

Having outlined others' understanding, both the participants then proceed to discount the understanding of others and to portray theirs as the correct understanding. In extract (2) the participant warrants her view, namely everyone is respected within the Muslim family as the correct one by saying a number of things. She explicitly states that the view women are not respected is wrong (line 11). She then quotes Islam as advocating respect for women. There is a commonsense understanding that Islam does not respect women. This is what G orients to when formulating others views about respect within the Muslim family. So therefore quoting Islam is a useful way of correcting misconceptions. Since G comes from the Muslim background she would also be heard by her listeners as speaking from a knowledgeable position. She further uses the extreme case formulations 'every' (line 6) and 'everybody' (line 12) when she elaborates on who are the people to be respected within the family. As mentioned earlier an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) is used as a conversation device to influence the listener when there is an indication that what is being said may not receive a sympathetic hearing. She also discusses the extent to which this is important to her (lines 15-16). This is evident from her formulation of wanting this aspect of culture to be followed by the next generation also. All these warrants suggest that G's view is the correct one. Similarly in extract (3) A discounts others opinion of her stating that she respects herself as a sign of being proud. She does this by providing another explanation for why she talks about respecting herself. She argues that her formulation is the

consequence of a particular philosophy which she holds. Her philosophy is that she expects others to treat her the same way as she treats them (line 9). So through a process of differentiating their meaning of the aspect of culture from others' meaning and through a process of discounting others' meaning, participants portrayed how the specified aspect of culture made sense to them.

**COMPARING WITH OTHER GROUPS/OTHER CULTURES TO FORMULATE IMPORTANCE**

Some respondents argued that aspects of culture were important only for their group. They contrasted with other groups to argue that others did not consider the specified aspects of culture as important. At other times they pointed out that the ways others practised these aspects of culture was not proper. They therefore argued that this was because others did not view the specified aspect of culture as important. The participants made comparisons with two groups of people, namely younger generation of their own ethnic group and other ethnic groups.

**Making comparisons with the younger generation**

In the following extract the participants provide a contrast between their generation and the younger generation.

Extract 4  
**Indian L.S.MW.S2**

1 J I can only speak for myself. I came from India. I was born and brought up in  
2 India. so for me there are so many things that I want to keep it because that's  
3 part of me, you know: what I eat what I speak and what I wear and so many  
4 things. But that's only talking about first generation and sort of our age group  
5 but for children it's completely different you know. When I'm I'm at home  
6 when my husband is with my children my family I like to speak  
7 in my own language because that's part of me, and sometimes explain things  
8 better in your own language than they use these. Sometimes mind you we all  
9 can speak very good English; we can read and write English no problem, it's  
10 just there are so many things you can't explain in English. Ahm, specially the  
11 food, ahm, I like English food I have loads of English friends. We go to their  
12 houses and things like that, but after couple of days I really miss my



13 *chappathi.*

((group laughter))

14 J Because that's me but for children I don't know. You can give them chips and  
15 burger everyday and they'll be very happy to eat it

16 K Children don't miss the food. They don't miss the dress code, I mean I'm  
17 talking about my children

18 I That's right

19 K My children don't miss the dress code. They are quite happy with the jean and  
20 things, OK I wear the trouser as well. I change with the time but I still if I am  
21 going out I don't feel dressed if I don't have a saree on my own. I don't feel  
22 comfortable in the *salwar kameez*. Even I wear *salwar kameez* but I don't  
23 feel dressed. I feel dressed in a *saree* and my children know if they are going  
24 to temple they have to wear the *salwar kameez*. They know about it. But  
25 as soon as leaving the house probably they put it on but as soon as they walk  
26 into the door again they go straight again to change  
27 T to change

28 I So they know there's a particular expectation there.

29 k With the food wise if you cook it, they will eat it. But two days on the trot  
30 they will eat it, third day they say not *chappathi* again mum.

31 T They want something different.

32 K Can't have something else mum? I will say what? Even mashed potato and  
33 beans they are quite happy with that. I mean but we miss it -- my husband  
34 has to have Indian meal once

J talks of membership to a particular category, first generation immigrant. The criteria for belonging to the category is outlined, namely country of birth, in this case India. She also specifies that she is a first generation immigrant (lines 1-4). Both J and K then formulate the importance of traditional aspects of culture to this group in a number of ways. The desire to uphold the culture is mentioned. J states her desire to uphold 'many' aspects of culture (lines 2-4). Further through using a three-part list she points out how she lives her culture. She says that what she eats, speaks and wears are important (line 3). Further participants romanticise their practice of particular aspects of culture such as wearing traditional dress and eating traditional food. Both participants portray the feelings associated with eating traditional food and wearing traditional clothes. In lines 12-13 and 33-34, J and K discuss how they can't stay without eating traditional food. In line 21 K discusses



how she feels dressed only in a *saree* and not in any other clothing. They discount the presence of such a feeling for other food or clothing. In line 11 J talks of eating English food but by adding how much she misses *chappati* implies that she does not feel the same way about English food. K's admission of not feeling dressed even in other Indian clothing suggests strong feelings only for her culture.

Having formulated the importance of traditional aspects of culture for this group of first generation immigrants both participants then contrast and argue that the same feelings and practice of culture is not seen among the younger generation. First, they argue that the younger generation will live on British food without missing the traditional food. J says that the younger generation will eat British food everyday (lines 14-15). The use of the extreme case formulation 'everyday' (line 15) reinforces that this is how the younger generation eat. The participants also argue that wearing of *saree* for the second generation is functional. They point out how their children wear it only when required. Further by adding that they are waiting to change into other clothes as soon as possible it is argued that the cultural symbolism of traditional clothes is not the same for their children as it is for them (lines 24-26). Thus participants by contrasting how the two categories value aspects of culture differently, establish that genuine feelings for culture resides with the first generation immigrants.

However the participants' accounting for the importance of culture has the potential for a number of assumptions to be made about them. They can be viewed as being old-fashioned, backward, unable to change and to relate to other cultures. The participants are oriented to all these assumptions and it is addressed in their accounting. They specify that they do relate to the dominant community. Thus J discusses her knowledge of English (line 9) her liking for English food (lines 11) and her having loads of English friends (line 11). Her formulation that she has many English friends through using the word 'loads' portrays her as genuinely relating to

the white culture. Similarly K portrays her involvement with the white culture by saying that she wears western clothing. Moreover in line 20 she explicitly states that she changes with the times. Thus both K and J address the implications of formulating the importance of traditional aspects of culture to them.

### **Comparing with the dominant community**

In the following extracts, the meanings and importance of different aspects of culture are constructed by comparing their practice of those aspects with how they are practised by the white or British community.

Extract 5

**Chinese L.S.M.W. S2**

(translated by C)

- 1 F says the moral side it's more family bonds is very important for the Chinese
- 2 and just we respect our elderly much more than the British, you know, things
- 3 like that just like for the westerner, once you are eighteen years old you just
- 4 leave house and have their own, you know, place to live or that kind of thing.
- 5 But for Chinese more or less we'll just stay, you know together

Here the speaker specifies family bonds and respect for the elderly as important aspects of culture. (lines 1-2). She then compares with the British and makes a claim that these values are more important for the Chinese (line 2). Her claim is warranted by producing an example. She portrays Chinese as staying together always in contrast to the white community who have the practice of leaving home at eighteen. By comparing with the British, F establishes what exactly she means by family bonds and respect.

In the following extracts the speakers not only make a comparison between their culture and the British culture but also in the process make negative assessments of the other culture and positive assessments of their own culture.

Extract 6

**African H.S.M.WS2**

- 1 **I** Ahm, just to start off, just from your experience and from where you  
2 come from, what aspects of culture for you would be very important?  
3 **S** I think I really feel very strongly like, ahm, see like I explained before in  
4 Zimbabwe at least for the liberation my gen and the generation which fought  
5 the liberation struggle with the men.  
6 **I** okay  
7 **S** So we earned like our respect with them in that sense.  
8 **I** mm  
9 **S** And like coming here you find that sometimes like you know culturally  
10 women are not recognised as much as they are in Zimbabwe. Like, ahm, if I  
11 mentioned before we have the women's ministry initially, now it's been  
12 merged in with another ministry. But at least the channels of making sure that  
13 like our rights are respected. They are channels of making sure that if you 14  
15 feel there's been some abuse, you know, like from the males and to the  
16 females  
17 **I** mm  
18 **S** these channels, and they have even like laws, like when I was in  
19 Zimbabwe there was like this one about thirty percent of women should be in  
20 management.  
21 **I** mm  
22 **S** So that forces like employers to push you up as well.  
23 **I** Like a positive discrimination.  
24 **S** a ha, you know.  
25 **I** okay  
26 **S** So I find that sometimes, yah. That is a bit frustrating in that you still have to  
27 prove your worth, but you are the same as them.  
28 **I** mm  
29 **S** You know, and it's, here they don't seem to have channels to do that really.  
30 You know even like salaries, women can get paid less

In extract (6) S states women's rights as an important aspect of her culture. She formulates that it was important part of her culture through providing two examples one referring to the past and one referring to the present context. Importance in the past is stated by producing a historical account. In lines 4-7 she talks of the women's participation in the freedom struggle. Importance in the current context is specified by referring to the importance given within the current political system. In lines 11-22 she talks of the existence of the women's ministry, the laws which are in favour of women and the presence of positive discrimination.

Moreover she ensures that her formulation of the importance given within her

culture to women's rights is not treated as an exaggeration by making reference to the difficulties. In lines 11-12 she mentions the merger of women's ministry with another ministry. She however discounts its significance in relation to the importance of having a ministry and channels of complaint. She also states that women have to still prove themselves (line 26). A further way in which she addresses any arguments against her formulation of women's rights as important is by suggesting that it may not be applicable to everyone. In line 4 by she makes reference to her knowledge of its relevance atleast to her generation. So although S modifies her account it still manages to convey the message that women's rights are an important aspect of the Zimbabwean culture.

Having formulated the ways in which women's rights are given importance in Zimbabwe she contrasts with the situation in Britain. She makes a critical evaluation of the British situation by saying that the British culture does not give recognition in the same way as the Zimbabweans do and also by pointing out the lack of channels in Britain for attending to women's rights. She reinforces her claim by saying 'even like salaries women can get paid less' (line 29). Negative assessment of the other culture's practice enables S to argue that women's rights is genuinely given importance only within her culture. Analysis of the next extract also suggests similar things.

Extract 7  
**African H.S.M.W. S2**

1 **R** for me I've been thinking in a sense what you just said H ah hanging onto  
2 your culture is for me is being in contact with people from my family and my  
3 parents sort of age group as well because they are the sort of people who  
4 came here from the West Indies and all the young people like people like me  
5 born here as you know first sort of generation and so it's important I feel to  
6 me it's important to stay contact family is very very important to me and it  
7 amazes me everyday sometimes when I speak to white people how little they  
8 see their brothers and sisters, and they hardly phone one another. I suppose  
9 there are lots of white people that do it. Strong thing. But in general I've  
10 found, you know, things "oh mum's like this sort of thing" and I think " oh  
11 God" and I think practically West Indian thing presume you are brought up  
12 to respect elders and things like this and that's the way I feel and that's the

13 way I bring up my children and you know whether your mum gets on your  
14 nerves or not I prepare everything for her

In this extract R specifies keeping in contact and respecting elders as important aspects of culture (lines 2 and 12). She builds an account of how they are important in a number of ways. She makes a direct statement that it is important to keep in contact with people from her family, people who are her parents' age and who came from West Indies, and other young people like herself who are the first generation of people born in Britain (lines 1-5). She further provides an example of her respect for elders by accounting for the things she does for her mother irrespective of her mother's behaviour (lines 13-14).

She then contrasts this with the practices of white people to suggest that they have different attitudes towards keeping in touch and respecting elders. She provides two examples as warrants for this behaviour. Her first example is that white people have hardly any contact with their brothers and sisters. In her second example she makes an assessment of their relationships to their mothers. She portrays the critical attitude of white people to their mothers by reporting what they say, namely " Oh mums like this sort of thing" (line 10). The way in which white people's attitude is presented to be heard as reported speech is interesting. It makes it appear to the listeners that she is reporting something which was actually said. So it emphasises that white people do have this kind of attitude. She further warrants that this is the behaviour of white people by displaying that her knowledge is first hand. She says that this is what she understands from speaking to white people (line 7). However the claims she makes regarding the attitude of white people is open to being undermined. Her listeners could argue that there are a number of white people who do keep in touch with their parents. She is oriented to her account being undermined in this way and therefore modifies her account by indicating that there are lots of white people who do maintain contact (lines 9) but then immediately discounting it by going on to state that this is not generally the case.



Moreover portraying her reactions to the attitudes of the white people as amazement and slight disgust enables the participant to make a further distinction between her culture and the white culture. It reinforces that this is not something that members of her culture do. In lines (6-7) she says that 'it amazes her' that white people do not give importance to keeping in contact. Similarly her response "Oh God" (line 10-11) to white peoples attitudes to their mothers also reinforces that she considers respecting her mother and elders as important and at the same time stands as a negative evaluation of white people. Once again the use of reported speech suggests that what she is reporting is something which actually happened. What is also achieved through this comparison is a positive evaluation of her culture. In the next extract also the participant through being overtly critical of the white community makes a positive evaluation of her own culture.

Extract 8

**Chinese H.S.M.W.S.2**

1 P I think it's also the simplest things you talked about food I think food is very  
2 important the sharing food and things and two things I've seen is that for  
3 example in my upbringing here or whatever I would invite people to my  
4 house maybe to eat and things particularly I am talking here mainly white  
5 people but very rarely do that we get invited back because some yes  
6 I'm doing more inviting than they are inviting me that's first I think  
7 it's because they like our food and the second is even down to the very simplest  
8 things like sitting down to when you're eating it's the way that you actually share  
9 the food I think in Asian in other people's cultures there's lot of it a very western  
10 one I mean you don't just scrape the last bit into your plate you make sure you  
11 ask round the room does anybody want it ahm but here it's like take as much as  
12 can you like first time round and then sit and don't care if it's enough I mean  
13 very subtle things like that which I think I would value as important but it's  
14 not the case here it's like you take what you can first time round and stuff all  
15 the rest of yours

In extract 8 P says that food and sharing of food are important aspects of culture. She then provides two examples to explain what the above aspects of culture mean to her. Her first example is about the extent of her hospitality to white people. She says that she invites 'white people' to her house a number of times (lines 3-6). She

further adds that she does more inviting than the white people. Her second example is about sharing of food. She portrays Asians' display of consideration for others by accounting for how they would ask others before taking the last bit of food. (lines 10-11). Further P's explicit statement that she values things such as making sure others have enough to eat indicates the importance she gives to sharing food. The above examples make a positive evaluation of the behaviour of members of her culture.

She then contrasts the behaviour of members of her culture with white people. First, white people are portrayed as hardly inviting her back even though she invites them many times (lines 5-6). However her claim can be treated as an overgeneralisation. It could be argued that not all white people do this. She orients to this and therefore her account is modified to state that 'some do' (line 5) thereby suggesting that there are exceptions. She also orients to the fact that her account can be heard to be extremely critical. To minimise the critical nature of her account she adds at the end of her account 'I think... it's because they like our food' (lines 6-7). This presents a positive reason for white people coming over more times. A further contrast is produced by portraying white people's behaviour with respect to sharing of food. By providing a vivid description of their habits she portrays them as being inconsiderate and possibly even greedy. In lines 11-12 and 14-15 she says that they take as much as they want the first time and not care if there is enough. P's account of white people's habits with respect to sharing of food is really elaborate. It is worked up to argue that this is how white people behave. Both her accounts result in her making negative evaluations of the white people. Further the contrast also works to reinforce that things like inviting people to a meal and sharing of food are important to her culture.

Having formulated the behaviour of the white community she also portrays her reactions to their behaviour. Her strong feeling regarding the white people's behaviour is brought out in her final colloquial statement. She says 'its like take what

you can first time round and stuff all the rest of yours' (lines 14-15). Her portrayal as in extract (7) further results in her making a distinction between the two cultures and presents practice by her own culture as the appropriate one.

In the final extract that we are analysing in this section the participant makes a comparison with the practice of the white culture and then explicitly states that she doesn't like it.

Extract 9

**Pakistani H.S.M.W.S2**

- 1 **T** Quite a few things and for the culture the most important to me is, I mean  
2 they should follow their religion and they should not follow the culture here 3  
like boyfriend and girlfriend and that's what I'm very scared of and marriage  
4 is most important and I want to pass this on I hope I will be  
5 **I** So that's very important to you?  
6 **T** Yes, yes, because from very young age that they start talking of boyfriends  
7 and girlfriends I don't want it, I don't like it.

Religion and marriage are specified as important aspects of T's culture (lines 2 and 3). She then contrasts that the culture in Britain is about having girlfriends and boyfriends (lines 3 and 6-7). Having contrasted the two cultures T explicitly expresses her dislike of this aspect of culture.

The main points from the above five analyses are the following: Participants specified the aspect of culture which was important to them. They warranted that they were important through producing examples and through using vivid descriptions (see Edwards and Potter, 1992). The providing of rich details are used to create an impression that 'things actually happened'. In this case the use of rich details helps to create the impression that 'this is the case'. Participants then produced contrasts which made relevant how others (white community/ younger generation) practised the aspects of culture described by them or did not practice them. The contrast produced resulted in presenting their practice as the appropriate practice. We have earlier discussed that the use of contrast structures as a conversation device brings out the preferrability of one item (see for example,

Smith, 1978, Atkinson, 1984). Further in this study contrasting with the white community resulted in a negative evaluation being made of the white culture and a positive evaluation of their own culture. Further in the last two extracts (7) and (8) the participants supported the work done by the contrasts by formulating their negative reactions to others' behaviour. This reinforced the distinction between the two cultures.

### **Comparing culture of origin and the British culture**

In the last section the comparison was made between the participants' culture and the dominant culture. Here the participants' culture is formulated as the culture of the country of origin rather than what is generally the case with them, namely their minority community in Britain.

Extract 10

**African H.S. M.W2**

- 1 **I** Of course you are not. (laughter). I am just shifting the topic a bit, I mean,  
2 talking of culture, what aspects of culture would you think are very important  
3 to you?  
4 **R** The unity (R laughs followed by I). Family unity, and just general unity. So  
5 like back in Africa your neighbour is, your neighbour's children are (unclear)  
6 you keep on them. Nobody is considered, considered to be interfering. If  
7 there is something wrong with your neighbour's children you discipline them.  
8 This kind of thing. So you stick together. So family unity is important, and  
9 yah  
10 mm  
11 **I** Keeping together?  
12 **D** Keeping together, it's important, which is not here.

R specifies that unity is an important aspect of culture. She then elaborates that this includes family unity and general unity. She provides an example of what this means. She says that it includes taking responsibility for your neighbour's children. However the caring is specified in almost the same way as how a parent or family member would care for them. This is warranted by her mention of the authority individuals have to discipline their neighbour's children. In contrast the participant

says in Britain this culture is not present. Stating absence of important aspects of her culture in Britain simultaneously implies absence of community in the sense it is understood in Africa.

**ASPECTS OF CULTURE - TASTING CULTURE ITSELF**

In this extract the participant actually considers food as equal to culture itself.

Extract 11  
**Indian.H.S.S.2**

- 1 **T** Yah, I think it's definitely true that you know different foods, different spices,  
2 different tastes, it's not just the different taste of the food, it's just the whole  
3 taste of the culture that you get when you eat the food.  
4 **I** mm  
5 **T** And ahm, I think that that's why it's so important, it's definitely very  
6 important to me, ahm. When I came here first, in Edinburgh it was  
7 a complete disaster for me, because I couldn't, I was just  
8 longing for just *dhal* and *rottia* and rice and ahm just  
9 Suranamese dishes I wanted, and it's not just available and I  
10 think that's really when you realise that you know you cannot have, your  
11 culture's not here.

T specifies food as an important aspect of culture. She then elaborates on what this means to her. Her formulation equates food with culture itself. She says that when she eats the food she gets the whole taste of culture (lines 2-3). So in this way the importance of food is formulated in an extreme way. That eating traditional food is actually culture itself is warranted through providing an example. The participant argues that she felt the absence of her culture when she could not eat her Suranamese food (lines 8-11).

However the items of food she lists namely, *dhal*, *roti* and rice are available in Edinburgh. So it could be argued that she can get them even though it may taste a little different. This further means that her listener could assume that the participant is over-exaggerating the importance and uniqueness of Suranamese food. These potential implications are managed by the participant by what she had said in the beginning of her response. The participant discounts that what she is missing is not



just the taste but something more than that, namely the essence of culture.

## MANAGING THE IMPLICATIONS OF FORMULATING THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE

In the last few extracts the respondents construct the importance of culture in very specific ways. Moreover the accounts are elaborately constructed using different conversation devices so that what culture means to them is brought out. However in some instances accounting for the importance of culture made certain deviant identities or unsuitable identities relevant for the participants. The participants orient to this as the following extracts illustrate.

### Extract 12

#### **Pakistani L.S. M.W. S2**

- 1 **I** ...if you think of culture or your culture, which would first come to your mind 2  
as the most important thing which aspect of culture which part of culture?  
3 **R** first is you know  
4 **Q** religion  
5 **R** is religion  
6 **Q** first religion, and secondly your dress, you *namaz* and food very strict you have  
7 to be in our religion  
(a few lines omitted)  
8 **Q** and we have to respect other culture as well

### Extract 13

#### **Indian H.S. M.W.S2**

- 1 **I** ah, one of the things like when you start talking about culture, or think of  
2 culture, what comes to your mind, or what aspects of culture would you  
3 consider as very important  
4 (.10)  
5 **R** majority is I think of myself as well as other people cultures are very  
6 important things you know (.) so in my own culture I tend to keep it to my  
7 own culture but I do respect other cultures and I tend to know about it as  
8 well (.) so  
9 I'm not ignorant but I do some kind of a, what do you call it, to get together  
10 our culture I find difficulty with that, to get to know them, I tend to get to  
11 know them I think, being in this country cultures are main issues sometimes I  
12 thought about it  
13 **I** and in what ways would you say that or what aspects of your culture would  
14 you think  
15 **R** in my culture I'm a Hindu and I just like my own culture as well as others as  
16 well

In extracts (12) and (13) both the speakers elaborate on the importance of culture. In extract (12) the speaker begins by listing aspects of her culture which are important, namely religion, dress, *namaz* (prayer), and food. She then formulates her religion in strict terms by mentioning that her religion demands strict adherence. Her statement portrays following religion as a rule or principle. In extract (13) the participant formulates the importance of her culture by stating that it is part of her thinking and that she tends to keep to her culture (lines 6-7) and likes her own culture (line 15). The participant's statements suggest a strong attachment to her culture.

The speakers' portrayal of the importance of culture in strict terms or in terms of strong attachment has the potential for their listeners to make a number of inferences. Thus in extract (12) others can view the participant's religion as imposing things on individuals. Moreover the religion being referred to is Islam. This is inferred from the participant's reference to *namaz*. Therefore the participant's account has the potential to reinforce some of the stereotypical assumptions which surround Islam and those who practice it. Media reports of Islamic fundamentalists portray them as eschewing the ideas and practices of western culture. So following religion so closely could mean that they will not relate to others or be open to other ideas. The respondent orients to such potential inferences and so after talking about the importance of aspects of culture in such strict terms she then goes on to say that she respects other cultures too. Her statement suggests that even though she follows her religion strictly it does not imply that she does not value other cultures. By talking of valuing other cultures the participant downplays the implications of formulating the importance of religion and culture to her in such rigid terms. Similarly in extract (13) also the participant talks about respecting other cultures. What is interesting is that each time R talks about her culture her statements always come with a second part which are always to do with respecting or considering other cultures important.

The following second parts were produced each time R spoke of her relationship to her culture: 'other peoples cultures are very important things', 'respect other cultures and 'I tend to know about it', ( I like) 'others as well'. The production of the second parts therefore manages any negative connotation which may arise because of her formulation of attachment to her culture. Further R also reinforces that she relates to others by explicitly stating that she is not 'ignorant' of other cultures. There is also some justification that her wanting to respect or knowing about cultures is not just a mere statement. She gives an account of why she thinks about cultures. In line 10 she says that thinking about culture is a consequence of being in Britain implying that she thinks about cultures since she lives in a multicultural society.

In the next extract also the speaker's formulation of the importance of culture has the potential for certain negative inferences to be made about the speaker. This is managed in the participant's account through negating the implication.

Extract 14

**Pakistani H.S.S. S2**

- 1 L ... language is very very important. It's so important because it more of an  
2 advantage to know more than one language, and if you forget your own  
3 language and, then that's like part of you you know there's something missing,  
4 and you can't communicate with people from own culture, from your own  
5 country, and you know your parents or your, even the future generation you  
6 cannot, and eventually you'll lose everything.  
7 I Yah  
8 L All the, like you'll lose the language, you'll lose the presence  
9 everything. And it starts, starts off with one thing  
10 I Yah  
11 L I'm, I'm not saying that you should be so deeply rooted into your own culture  
12 I Yah  
13 L But it's an important factor and it shouldn't be forgotten.

L specifies that language is very important. She then builds a case for why it is important, by stating that it has practical value, it is necessary for communicating with members of the traditional culture (both older and the future generations) and because its part of the individual. She reinforces the importance of language by stating that losing the language will mean losing everything (line 6). Using the

extreme case formulation 'everything' (Pomerantz, 1986) is a way of justifying her claim to the listener, particularly since her argument is flawed in a number of ways. The number of minorities in Britain speak English and communication and practical value as reasons for upholding traditional language may not be accepted. Moreover the future generations born and brought up in Britain can speak English, and so communication with the future generation is definitely not a problem.

L's formulation of the importance of language in this extreme way has the potential for certain inferences to be made about her. She could be seen as immersed in her culture. L is oriented to these assumptions as her later statement suggests. She states explicitly that her advocating for traditional language does not mean she is advocating being 'deeply rooted' in the traditional culture (line11). This implies that she herself is not to be seen as being confined to the traditional culture. In this way she resists the kind of identity being made relevant for her in her accounting for the importance of language.

Summarising in this section we often observe that the importance of aspects of culture is formulated to be seen as *essential* to the speakers. Thus as one speaker said, an individual *had to* follow the aspects of culture. In extract (14) the speaker argues that not holding on to language would mean losing everything. Such formulations while constructing the importance of aspects of culture simultaneously create other deviant or unsuitable identities for the women. The participants' accounts indicate that they orient to these identities being made relevant and that they address it by stating the ways in which they are different to what could be assumed.

## **BEING IN TWO CULTURES**

So far our analytical observations were that participants specified a particular aspect of culture as important and then elaborated on what it actually meant to them and how they practised it. We also discussed the consequences of such formulations. However there were times when the genuineness of participants' admission of the



importance of culture was questioned. Analyses of the following two extracts enables us to understand why this happens.

Extract 15

**Indian.H.S.M.W.S2**

1 N Again as S.L mentioned I'm from the Sikh community as well. I'm Sikh to me  
2 the culture is very very important but if you leave your culture and you lose  
3 your identity and one thing again I teach language and if you lose your  
4 language you lose your culture and to me it is it is very very important and it  
5 is religion one thing is again S mentioned about a maintaining your own  
6 religion not cutting hair not showing your legs but to me is religion in your 7  
heart not it's your Sikhism in your heart not in your hair and because  
8 definition was on my character four five years ago ah that was again from  
9 Sikh community and still I had to fight for that I had to shut their mouth it's  
10 nothing to do with my clothes nothing to do with the language I may dress up  
11 it's Sikhism or culture in my heart wherever I go in different community I 12  
wear my own traditional clothes and I try to maintain both culture and take 13  
advantage from both culture advantage from your own culture and advantage  
14 from western culture too and weigh both of them and take advantage

Extract 16

**Indian H.S.M.W.S2**

1 K Well ah I'm a Hindu and I was born in Newcastle and I'm from a very strong  
2 Hindu community I myself ah I have battled with my own identity I suppose  
3 battled with where do I fit in who am I and I think that was to do with the  
4 conflicts of the culture not being in the schools I think if the culture had been  
5 carried through into our schooling maybe that identity may not have been  
6 soiled, shattered or tampered with ah so in that sense it was very difficult to  
7 hold one culture but experience another culture so ah in that I've worked  
8 through all of that in being an adult but its very difficult I I'm  
9 actually married an Irish guy so again that's something that's  
10 frowned upon within my own culture but not within my own family  
11 and the more extended family in Newcastle there's support so there's  
12 another difference of cultures coming in there I think I think you know  
13 a bit like N I believe that religion is something that's from within  
14 and I think no matter who or what in Hinduism what I was  
15 taught was that all religions should be respected and all cultures should be  
16 respected that's what my mother's and that's what I hold dear I agree it doesn't  
17 have to be for me anyway with me physically it's what I wear is what I feel so  
18 culture is important and not I actually really I find it really important to give  
19 my children they're from mixed race which I think is something  
20 more common than was to have both it's not just the Indian Asian  
21 culture you'd also choose the western I think I have grasped both  
22 perhaps more than most I think in a sense I've become an oddity



In extracts (15) and (16) participants specify aspects of culture which are important to them and then elaborate on them. In extract (15) N specifies the Sikh culture as important to her. Two aspects of the Sikh culture are then named as important to follow, namely language and religion. N formulates the importance of language in an extreme way. She argues that losing language means losing the individual's culture itself (line 3-4).

N then elaborates on the importance of religion through contrasting what religion is and is not. She argues that religion for her is something internal. In lines 7 and 11 she says that religion is in her heart. In contrast to this she argues what religion is not. She argues that religion is not an external thing, indicated through outward symbols such as hair and traditional dress. Further the contrasts are embedded within the same statement bringing out the appropriate understanding of religion. In line 7 we see the contrast, it's your Sikhism in your heart not in your hair' and in lines 10 -11 the contrast statement is 'nothing to do with my clothes nothing to do with the language I may dress up it's Sikhism or culture in my heart'. Similarly in extract (16) the participant specifies religion as important and then formulates it as an internal thing. She says religion is from within (line 13) and religion is what she feels (line 17). In contrast to this she argues that religion is nothing to do with external clothing. In lines 17 she says religion is not 'what I wear is what I feel'. In this way the outward symbolism of religion is discounted as the real thing. She further elaborates on the teachings she was given and says that she was taught to respect all religions and cultures.

Both participants then proceed to formulate others' understanding of religion as different from theirs. In line 6 N discusses that others consider that religion is maintained through outward symbolism such as 'not cutting hair' and 'not showing legs'. K is not very explicit but she makes a statement in line 14 which suggests that

there are other ways of understanding religion. After her formulation of religion as an internal thing K says 'no matter who or what in Hinduism' (line 14) before going on to discuss what she was taught. Her statement implies that others may say different things or even Hinduism may be interpreted in different ways. Moreover others' view of religion fits in with what the participants have argued religion as not. The implication of this is that others' formulation of religion is discounted as the relevant one.

We may ask why did the participants go to such lengths to formulate what religion means to them, what it is not and to discount others' formulation on the basis of the contrasts made between the two. The answer to the question lies within the participants' accounts. In both the accounts we find that the participants' lifestyles were not viewed as adhering to their culture. N talks of how members of the Sikh community held negative views about her lifestyle. In lines 8-9 she says that there was 'definition was on (her) my character four five years ago ah that was again from Sikh community'. It is in response to this negative view of the community that N formulates what she feels is the correct way of practising religion. Her response suggests that the Sikh community did not see her as practising religion the way they thought she should. Moreover N's focusing on dress and hair suggests that it is possibly in these two aspects that she is following other ways. N's later insistence of maintaining two cultures and taking advantage from the western culture further suggests that what N has possibly embraced is a *western* hairstyle and dress. Her external appearance was therefore conflicting with the community's view of what is true practice of religion. A possible consequence of this is that they did not view her as a true follower of her religion and culture. It is this that N orients to and by discounting others' formulation of religion maintains her own religious integrity. N minimises the negative connotations of following the western culture in two more ways. She says that she does wear traditional clothes depending on the context (line

12). Also she elaborates on the advantages of being in two cultures. Moreover she presents herself as someone able to weigh the pros and cons of both cultures and to take advantage. This makes her appear in a positive light rather than being seen negatively for being in two cultures.

Similarly in extract (16) K says that she had done something which was not culturally acceptable. In lines 9-10 she says that she 'married an Irish guy' and that this was 'frowned upon within (her) my own culture'. So here again we see K can be viewed as a non-believer by members of her community on the basis of choosing to marry a non-Hindu. She could be seen as having diluted her culture by marrying outside her community. However by discounting others' ideas of what Hinduism should be and by stating what religion means to her K is able to suggest to her listeners that she still can claim that she considers religion as important for her. K also minimises the significance that being in two cultures implies a loss of the individual's culture and religion through other ways. In lines 21-23 K formulates being in both cultures as an advantage over those who are in just one culture. Although the advantage is not explicitly stated K's statement that she has grasped both cultures presents her as being in a more knowledgeable position than others. She also labels herself as an 'oddy'. Her label introduces a slight humour into her account. The humour has the effect of downplaying the significance of being in two cultures as a problematic thing. Finally we consider an account that K produces right at the start of her response. K talks of her school life and the conflicts of culture she faced there (lines 4-7). K through using the term 'battle' argues that this was a difficult process. However K's account portrays her as overcoming the situation. From what happens later on in K's response we can argue that the possible placing of this account at the start of the response is to suggest to her listeners that K had been in other situations where losing her culture was a possibility but that she did not. What follows therefore is that being married to an Irish person does not mean

that she would lose her culture, she is capable of holding on to it.

In both the accounts the participants are oriented to the fact that they may not be viewed as authentic members of their culture since they were involved with the western culture. The participants in their accounting formulate that they are genuine followers of their culture by constructing their version of what religion is and discounting the existing version of religion as inadequate.

### **ASPECTS OF CULTURE - VARIED MEANINGS**

The findings of our analyses has pointed out that respondents went further than specifying which aspects of culture they considered important. Each respondent elaborated on what exactly the aspect of culture meant to them and how it was important. Thus participants talked about the different ways in which the same aspect of culture could be understood, discussed the ways in which others imputed meanings to particular aspects of culture and talked of how the same aspect of culture was practised differently by different groups to bring out the importance of culture to them. The participants' talk resonates with some of the latest developments in the understanding of culture and its symbols.

Within psychology the traditional way by which ethnic identity has been assessed is by finding out how much individuals are involved in the cultural practices of their group. There are two assumptions which are made when aspects of culture are used to assess ethnic identity. The first is that there is a single meaning attached to each symbol. Secondly as we have earlier discussed the assumption is that there is a direct relationship between aspects of culture and ethnic identity. However within other disciplines such as sociology and anthropology the attachment of a single meaning for aspects of culture or what they term as symbols has been questioned. Cohen (1985: 18) a social anthropologist argues that symbols are flexible and can be bent into the idiosyncratic shapes of meaning. He further argues that the changes occurring because of this may not be visible to others who use the same symbol.



Moreover since many of the symbols do not have a physical or visual expression there is a greater possibility of them being invested with variable meanings. This understanding that symbols have varied meaning further suggests that when individuals share the same symbols it doesn't necessarily follow that they share the same meaning. As Cohen (1985: 16) says,

Culture, constituted by symbols, does not impose itself in such a way as to determine that all its adherents should make the same sense of the world. Rather it merely gives them the capacity to make sense and, if they tend to make a similar kind of sense it is not because of any deterministic influence but because they are doing so with the same symbols.

Within psychology also the assigning of single meaning to categories, identities, culture and so on have been questioned by those psychologists such as Potter and Wetherell (1987), Wetherell and Potter, (1992). Culture as having different meanings has also been argued for by researchers such as Phoenix (1994), Saifullah Khan, (1982) and Westwood (1984). We argue in concluding this discussion that symbols/aspects of culture should therefore be viewed as flexible and variable.

Coming back to our participants' accounts what we observed is that participants exploit the understanding that each aspect of culture or symbol can be understood in different ways in their talk. Moreover what we also observed is that in their formulation varied meanings were produced at the *content level* of the symbol. In most cases the *form of the symbol* remained the same. This we observed when participants made distinctions between the different ways by which religion can be understood (extract1). Participants also distinguished between their way of understanding the symbol and how others could understand it (extracts 2 and 3). So it was by changing the content of the symbol that participants talked of the importance of the particular symbol to them. Possibly what this helped the participants to maintain was a sense of individuality. Another possibility is that it avoided the negative connotations which imputation of meaning by others could



result in. For example we observed that one of the participants talked of how respect for the family within Islam may not be accepted by others, since there exists the view that within Muslim cultures women are not respected. In the other example (extract 3) the participant explicitly states that others could negatively think of her specifying respect for herself as a portrayal of pride. That others can impute meanings which can have negative connotations can also be made on the basis of our analytical observations of extracts (12) and (13). We saw that participants were oriented to the negative implications of specifying culture in particular ways and addressed it.

Further as long as flexibility was confined to content it did not become problematic for the participants. Since the form remained the same, continuity was maintained and the participants could on the basis of the shared symbol invest in the feelings of group membership and in the process have a sense of holding on to their culture. However when flexibility was seen in *form* then difficulties arose. This we saw in extracts (16) and (17) when the visible characteristics of the symbols were changed. The interesting feature at this point was the way in which continuity and upholding of culture was maintained, through portraying that the content did not change. The two participants in these extracts spoke of maintaining religion even though they dressed differently or had married into a different culture.

## **COMPARING WITH THE DOMINANT CULTURE**

In a number of accounts we observed that participants contrasted how they practised a particular aspect of culture with how members of the white community practised it. The result of such a comparison was that participants could portray that their practice was the appropriate one and thereby claim ownership to that aspect of culture. One of the theoretical explanations for this comparison is Tajfel's social identity theory (1981). According to Tajfel groups compare themselves with other groups and discriminate positively in favour of their own group. The consequence of this is a

positive social identity. However when minorities compare themselves with the majority Tajfel argued that the result is not a positive identity but a negative identity. We have discussed earlier how he also suggested that minorities overcome this negative identity through a number of strategies, one of which is social creativity. Social creativity is a process whereby participants redefine some of the negative characteristics of their group positively or find new dimensions along which they could reassess their group positively. In this study the participants' accounting for symbols such as respect for the family, sharing of food and family unity as unique to them could be interpreted as a consequence of their social creativity strategies. However we have already discussed in length the difficulties with accepting the assumption of social identity theory that minorities have a negative identity. This makes it difficult to accept what the participants say as a strategy to overcome their negative identity. A different viewpoint which has been offered by Cohen (1985) offers us another way of understanding the participants' accounts of comparison.

Cohen argues against seeing the assertiveness of the community as something which is done on the basis of commitment to the inherent character of the community. Instead he suggests viewing this entire process of comparison as a way of creating distinction between other communities. A possible method is through such a comparison. So while positive and negative evaluations may be a consequence of the comparison they are not necessarily the purpose of the comparison. What the participants are possibly doing is making sense of what the others do in terms of what is understood within their own cultures.

So what do we make of the negative and critical attitude expressed by the minorities? Do we just say that it is a consequence of their making distinctions and leave it at that? We find difficulty with simplistically accepting such a view when it is members of the dominant community who make such negative evaluations of others. Critical or negative attitudes of the dominant community are immediately

labelled as racist. The way in which racist attitudes or prejudiced attitudes are expressed by the white community has been addressed by a number of studies such as Wetherell and Potter (1992), van Dijk (1992), and Hopkins *et al* (1997). As Solomos (1989) says there has been renewed interest in the way that racist ideologies are developed and how they contribute to racist discourse and practices. There has also been attention given to the role of the popular press and media in shaping social relations between the dominant community and ethnic minorities. A number of studies have addressed how such press coverage can present minorities as outsiders and a threat to social cohesion. On the basis of such findings the focus of race relations has been to legislate against racism and also to promote non-discriminatory practices. Moreover the extent to which such legislature and equal opportunities policies work are constantly questioned. The focus of race relations work has therefore been very much on changing the attitudes and practices of the majority community. What this means is that negative views expressed by the majority are being treated differently. Any suggestion that attitudes of the minorities should be treated in a similar way is usually downplayed by saying that only those with power can be racist. Moreover there are the valid fears that such discussions could hinder the political cause and allow oppressive practices to continue. An examples of which is that the attitudes of minority communities are reasons for lack of participation of minorities in the labour market. At the same time we cannot also label the attitudes of the minority community towards the majorities as a mere consequence of making distinctions. This is a dilemma for researchers. While we do not have a definite solution to this problem what we can advocate is that we pay further attention to the negative and critical attitudes which are formulated by minorities towards the white communities for making race relations work effectively. This may mean more efforts being made to bring the communities together. This is possibly an area which needs further study for future policies on race relations.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this chapter we have discussed the flexible and varied ways in which the participants formulated meanings and importance of aspects of culture. The flexible and varied ways in which the participants constructed the meanings of culture implies that it is problematic to view aspects of culture as indicators of the ethnic identity of individuals. Rather we focused on what was achieved through the changes in content and form of the symbols of culture. We argued that continuity of the symbol was maintained either in form or content. We further argued that assertiveness of the community should be viewed as just a way in which participants made distinctions between themselves and others and not because it had implications for their identity. Finally we pointed out that future work on race relations needs to take account of the implications of the attitudes of ethnic minorities towards the white community.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **ETHNIC MINORITY WOMEN: INFLUENCES ON THEIR DECISION TO WORK**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter 1 we had argued that to adequately understand employed ethnic minority women's identities other aspects of their lives such as employment, gender and class should also be addressed. In this study we decided to focus specifically on the participants' work. The type of work/employment which we are referring to in this study is paid work. We do not underestimate the work that women do within the home and we are sympathetic to the debates arguing for valuing of women's unpaid work. However in order to understand the women's lives outwith the home and family it is necessary to focus on paid work. Moreover it also takes into account the current understanding of work. As Pahl (1994) reminds us it is in the nineteenth century that work has become equated with paid work or work which has some monetary compensation. Moreover we argued that being a minority was presented as the main influence on their working lives and on this basis the ethnic minority women were assumed to have particular identities. As we analyse participants' accounts in the following three chapters, we find that participants orient to the ways in which culture and minority status are considered to be influences on their working lives.

In this Chapter, first, we present a brief review of theoretical and empirical work discussing ethnic minority women's entry into the labour market. The review brings out the difference of opinion between different researchers as to what should be considered as the main influences on ethnic minority women's entry into the labour market. We also consider the reasons offered by the different researchers for their claims. The rest of the chapter is devoted to analysing participants' accounts of the different influences on their choice to work. Some individuals discuss about their entry into paid work without specifically discussing about a particular job or career.



Whereas others discuss about why they chose to do a particular job such as nursing. The different influences discussed by the participants include culture, family, class and discrimination. We consider how these influences are worked up within the participants' accounts and to what end.

## **ETHNIC MINORITY WOMEN'S ENTRY INTO THE LABOUR MARKET**

There is a large body of sociological literature discussing women's work. The section on Work in the book 'Defining Women' edited by Mc-Dowell and Pringle (1994) gives a lucid overview of current discussions of women's work such as differences between paid and unpaid work, the gendered nature of the labour market, racial segregation of the labour market and the question of what should be considered work. Since our focus in this study is employed ethnic minority women our review mainly considers literature which deals with issues related to ethnic minority women's participation in the labour market. The review suggests that ethnic minority women's entry into the labour market is usually explained using one or more of three types of explanations, namely cultural explanations, historical and economic explanations and the much more recent focus on race and gender discrimination. In the following section we discuss them.

### **Cultural explanations**

The role of culture and family influencing the decision of ethnic minority women to work has been discussed by a number of researchers, such as Saifullah Khan (1979) speaking of South-Asian cultures and Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1994) speaking about how gender divisions within an ethnic group influence the entry of ethnic minority women into the labour market. Saifullah Khan (1979:120-121), discussing South-Asian women's entry into work, says that the assessment of which type of job is suitable is based on the following principles which are upheld by the South-Asian culture. First, the very specific division of labour between males and females.

Second, the distinction between what is high-status work and work which is considered potentially dirty work or low status work such as cleaning and domestic work. Third, preferring work which does not allow the women to come in contact with men outside the family. Khan, while accepting that there are variations in the practice of *purdah*<sup>1</sup>, holds the view that the three principles are practised to a greater or lesser extent among all of the South-Asian communities. Khan further adds that for South-Asian women working is only acceptable if they do not neglect the family or threaten the husband's position as the main wage earner. Thus according to Khan culture plays an important part in determining whether or not South-Asian women work or in deciding what kind of work they do. Similarly Afshar (1994) in a qualitative study of Muslim women in West Yorkshire living in three-generation households discusses the impact of culture on the Muslim women's entry into the labour market. Afshar defines three generation households as those having the presence of grandmother, mother and granddaughter. Afshar says that cultural notions of what women can and can't do are still around. Afshar's study focused on education and the labour market. She hypothesised that the youngest generation would show greatest resistance to traditional notions of Islam. She had expected the younger generation to choose paid work over marriage and so on. However her findings were otherwise. Afshar found that the Muslim women considered marriage and motherhood as more important. She therefore argues that the women are still very much influenced by cultural norms not necessarily through force but through their own choice.

Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1994:112) have also similarly argued about the role of culture in ethnic minority women's participation in the labour market. They say

The internal gender divisions of an ethnic group... affect the participation of men and women of the group in the labour market. Men and women of a specific ethnic group will tend to hold particular but different positions in the labour market; for example, Afro-

Caribbean men in the construction industry and on the buses, Afro-Caribbean women as service workers in manufacturing and as nurses, Asian men in textile firms and Asian women as outworkers in small-scale dress-making factories.

Anthias and Yuval-Davis add that the difference between the types of work done by Afro-Caribbean's and Asians could be partly explained by the different family and gender ideologies. In a recent study by Espin (1995) of immigrant women in America culture is offered as the explanation for why ethnic minority women face resistance from their communities to situations which provide them the opportunity for change in life-styles. However the cultural explanations have their critics. Researchers such as Parmar (1982) and Brah (1994) argue that the popularity of cultural explanations is because of the inadequate attention given to historical and political factors which push ethnic minority women into sections of the labour market or prevent them from entering into the labour market. They say that cultural discourses reinforce the stereotypical images of ethnic minority women and their communities and they undermine the role of other causes such as discrimination. As Parmar (1982:253) says:

Even where cultural and religious norms do have a more decisive influence than the lack of access to appropriate jobs outside the home, to ignore other structural constraints leads to a crude, monocausal explanation which is also mystifying, in that, it conceals the complexity which shapes these women's lives.

The effects of discrimination in the labour market due to race and gender are therefore argued to be important causes for the absence of black women in the labour market or their restriction to particular sectors of the labour market. The criticisms against the cultural explanations have been therefore addressed by offering other explanations such as historical explanations and through considering the effects of discrimination. It is to these we now turn our attention.

## **Historical and Economic Explanations**

Parmar (1982) and Brah (1994) have attempted to rectify the emphasis on cultural explanations by presenting the historical realities which have governed Asian women's entry into the labour market. For Parmar (1982) going back to history means going back to pre-migration days. She points out that by taking a look at the economic activities of ethnic minority women prior to migration dismisses the myth that the ethnic minority women came from societies where women were not in paid employment. According to her having this kind of historical information will enable us to see that particular patterns of employment or unemployment for ethnic minority women are the consequence of other factors such as migration, and the economic and political situation in the host country. Similarly Brah (1994) argues a need for grounding explanations in a historical perspective. Brah discusses that in post-war Britain the economic boom led to drawing in of immigrant labour. Moreover these immigrant communities were pre-dominantly concentrated in the low-waged sector. This was particularly because historically immigrant labour was mainly solicited in areas of employment which were deemed hazardous or dirty or of low status by the white indigenous population (Amin and Oppenheim, 1992). Low status work meant lower pay and therefore lower living standards. This also meant that the areas where the immigrant population could afford to rent accommodation were mainly inner city areas. All these factors, namely the type of work ethnic minorities did, the amount they earned and where they lived then affected the type of employment they could get. So in a sense it was a vicious circle. Initially it was only the men who came to work. It was later that the women and families joined them. The same factors also affected the ethnic minority women's entry into the labour market. As Brah (1994) argues the class positions of the men and the localities where they lived, namely inner city areas, had a crucial effect on the types of work available to immigrant women when they joined their husbands. She goes further to explain how the market

forces impacted on what work was available to the women. Thus according to her when the women came in the late 1960's and early 1970's mass production was concentrated in the factories and this led to the women working in the manufacturing sector. Then later when multinationals came into the picture and there was a decline in the manufacturing industry ethnic minority women suffered massive job losses. The emphasis then changed to flexible work and contracting out. This meant that the ethnic minority women then moved on to do homeworking and other such work which suited the different economic climate. Thus for Brah the employment patterns of ethnic minority women depends on the nature of the economy which results in the recruitment of ethnic minorities to do low paid work. As a consequence they live in poorer areas resulting in their belonging to a lower class strata. So for Brah it is patterns of change in the economy which affects what work ethnic minority women do and not merely cultural factors.

### **Race and Gender Discrimination**

The third explanation offered is that discrimination plays an important role in the positioning of ethnic minority women in the labour market. It is well documented that all women experience disadvantage as a consequence of their gender ( for examples see Tittle 1981, Breakwell 1986 and Banks *et. al.*1992). However establishing the additional disadvantage that ethnic minority women face as a consequence of race is difficult. This is because the findings of surveys such as Colin Brown (1984) suggest that both black women and white women have the common disadvantage due to gender and as a consequence the difference because of race is not significant. So establishing disadvantages due to race is difficult. As Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1994: 112) say:

In employment terms, migrant or ethnic women are usually closer to the female population as a whole than to ethnic men in the type of wage-labour performed. Black and migrant women are already so disadvantaged by their gender in employment that it is difficult to



to show the effects of ethnic discrimination for them.

However this difficulty is addressed by Bruegal (1994:180-181) who argues that the impact of race on employment patterns for black and white women can be exposed if certain factors are taken into consideration. Bruegel uses the findings of the London Living Standards Survey done between 1981 and 1986 to support her argument. She points out that significant differences between black and white women can be seen if the qualifications possessed by the women are related to the type of work they do. According to her one in five black men and women with qualifications beyond A level are working in jobs which do not demand such qualifications, compared to less than 1 per cent of white men and 10 per cent of white women. Further Bruegal (1994) points out that black women graduates in London earn on average only 71 per cent as much a week as white women graduates. She goes on to add that black women are often working longer hours in both full-time and part-time work than white women. She concludes that if the 'total employment package' is considered black women are at a greater disadvantage than white women. Case studies done by researchers such as Essed (1994) provide further evidence that discrimination affects the career prospects of black women.

From the discussion of the three explanations we can now suggest that ethnic minority women's entry into the labour market and the types of work they do is said to be influenced by a number of things such as race, gender, migration, the political and economic situations and class positions that ethnic minority communities come to occupy as a result of all the above and not just exclusively a consequence of their culture or family norms and values. Our analytical section begins with considering the response made by participants when they were asked what made them decide to work and whether it was their choice to work.

**PARTICIPANTS ACCOUNTS OF WHY THEY CHOSE TO WORK OR DO PARTICULAR WORK**

The participants in this study did a variety of work. However the majority of them did what is traditionally termed as women's work . They did social work, clerical work, community work, creche work, teaching (schools, college and university) and waitressing. Only a few did other kinds of work such as working in finance, working as a landscape architect and as a pharmacist. Some participants talked in general about their entry into the job market whereas others specified why they chose to do particular work such as nursing. Further the participants spoke of the different influences on what they chose to do. We begin our analysis by focusing on the accounts of some participants who spoke of the difficulties they overcame in making a decision to work.

**CONSTRUCTING THE CULTURAL CONTEXT - WORKING WITH FAMILY EXPECTATIONS AND NORMS**

In this section all the participants provide us with background information about the kinds of context within which their decision to work was made. Sometimes participants portrayed themselves as negotiating with family expectations. At other times they portrayed themselves as going against the prescribed norms.

**Marriage versus Study/Work**

In the first two extracts the respondents begin their accounting of their decision to work by providing some information of the expectations of their family and culture.

Extract 1

**African L.S.M.W.S1**

- 1 I will ask. ya. Okay. Going back to when you were first working, or, not here,
- 2 it could be somewhere else, wherever when you first started working itself,
- 3 was it your choice to start working?
- 4 R ahm. Actually when I chose to go to work first time (.) it was (.) maybe I
- 5 I first time

6 **R** go just a wee bit back, I have got five sisters which I am number three.  
 7 **I** Okay  
 8 **R** So when I thought of just going to university it was too difficult  
 9 for my family to understand that because in our way they don't,  
 10 they don't appreciate, they don't encourage that the girls do  
 11 higher education but anyway I done my  
 12 university; and it wasn't easy for them to accept it. So  
 13 when I finished the very thing is to get married.  
 14 But I said no. And I was lucky because my, my,  
 15 fiancée was doing his (.) study in England. So they said, okay, until he  
 16 finished, its okay, I can work only for two years work when he is coming  
 17 home so I can get married. And for me work was something  
 18 **I** okay  
 19 **R** I was always dream of, and even don't know from where to start because I  
 20 wanted to do everything, everything I wanted to do.

Extract (2)

**Indian. H.S.M.W.S.1**

1 **I** m hm. So it was basically your choice to do this a  
 2 **P** oh yes, yes  
 3 **I** Were any family member or anyone else influencing you?  
 4 **P** No  
 5 **I** or was it your choice?  
 6 **P** No, ahm, my, my, I come a very conservative Indian family. And my father  
 7 had five daughters. So he just wanted us married quickly. (S: slight laughter)  
 8 In fact when I originally decided to do this  
 9 **I** m hm  
 10 **P** and because it was a university course, and I needed to go to university, ahm,  
 11 I had to make a deal with my father. And the deal was that he would let me  
 12 go to university if I got married. That was the deal. So I did it,  
 13 because I didn't care about the marriage, I cared about the  
 14 things at university ((slight laughter))  
 15 **I** oh  
 16 **P** ((laughter continuing)) because that's the only way I could go, so I had  
 17 to do. So I did it. Ahm, and the marriage didn't last

In both the extracts both the respondents provide background information about the nature of their families and their expectations of them. In both the extracts the families of the participants are formulated as being conservative. Thus in extract (1) R through using a three-part list (Jefferson, 1991) argues that her family did not encourage women to go for higher studies. In lines 9-11 R says 'in our way they don't, they don't appreciate, they don't encourage that the girls do higher education'.

The three-part list suggests that the participants' account of the family/community response is not just based on one situation but that this is something more general (see Potter, 1996). Moreover her list also suggests that the negative response of the family/community is part of their thoughts and actions. Further the speakers' opening statements also contributes to suggesting that the family does not encourage women working.. In line 6 the speaker says that she wants to 'go a wee bit back' before responding to the interviewer's question and formulating the family's negative attitude. What referring to the past does is emphasising that what the speaker says is correct. So what is established is that the family behaviour was the same even when she went to study and this further emphasises her assessment of the family as being the right one. In extract (2) the speaker explicitly states that she came from a conservative family (line 6).

Having formulated their families as conservative the speakers then proceed to state the expectations of their families. Both of them produce a contrast between what they wanted to do and what their families expected them to do. The family expectation for both the participants is portrayed as marriage. By contrast the speaker in extract (1) wanted to work and the speaker in extract (2) wanted to go for higher education. Each participant produces an account which warrants that marriage is the expected behaviour from them. In both the extracts the speakers provide an account which portrays them negotiating a deal between their family and themselves. In extract (1) the deal was that the participant would be allowed to work only for the limited time her fiancée was away. The implication being that once he was back she had to get married. In extract (2) the participant was allowed to go for higher studies if she agreed to get married.

By complying to this deal the participants then state that they did what they wanted. However there are certain implications which arise because of the participants' portrayal of doing what they wanted by giving in to some of the

demands made by their families. The agency of the participants becomes questionable. It could also be argued that the participants' interest in working was not what they made it out to be. The interviewer's question was about choice so the participants have to work with these implications to ensure that their agency was not undermined because of their 'making deals'. The respondents in their accounts orient to these assumptions and address it in a number of ways.

Both participants provide information about the number of females in the family. In extract (1) the participant says that they are five sisters and that she is the third one (line 6). In extract (2) the participant says that they are five daughters (line 7). What this information does is possibly to portray the pressure from their families to get married as reasonable. In most Eastern cultures the number of girls in the family and the position of the girls in the family is significant. It is commonsense knowledge that when there are more number of girls in the family the parents are concerned about their getting married and settling down. Further because the usual practice is marrying the girls according to age, there is the added concern that allowing an older daughter to pursue her interest could affect younger sisters from settling down. So drawing on available cultural understanding portrays their agreeing to the deal as a reasonable thing to do and as ordinary practice. This undermines the negative connotations that they have compromised their individual agency.

Second, both the participants formulate that they do enjoy working. In extract (1) lines 19 and 20 the participant formulates her interest in work in an extreme way. She says that working is what she 'always' wanted to do and also states that she wanted to do 'everything'. In extract (2) the participant formulates the importance of work by contrasting what matters to what did not matter. Thus in lines 13 and 14 she argues that she 'didn't care about the marriage' but that she cared 'about the things at university'. So getting married is portrayed as not significant. She



further downplays the significance of marriage by providing additional information in line 17 that her marriage did not last.

Next both the speakers discount others influencing their decision to work. In extract (1) the speaker's opening statement establishes that it was her choice to work. She begins her response by saying 'when I chose to work it was...'(line 4). In extract (2) the speaker explicitly denies being influenced by others (line 4). Finally the contrast between the constructed cultural setting, its restrictive and non-encouraging nature and what the participants decided to do enables the construction of a particular kind of identity for the participant, namely as someone who did what she wanted.

So in this way both the participants portray the difficult situations they had to face and how they negotiated with their families to do what they wanted.

**Not doing work which other family members did**

In the following two extracts the participants chose to do work which was different from what other members of the family did. The participants provide reasons for making these choices.

Extract (3)

**Pakistani. H.S.M.W.S1**

1 S when my mother was working it was sewing in the house you know the  
2 manufacturers who make a huge profit and they get something like a few  
3 pence per garment and I found that that made me more determined to be I'm  
4 not going to end up like that you know I'm not going to be exploited its  
5 usually your own community that exploited them like that  
6 P yes yes  
7 S because they would have trouble getting out of the house and you know they  
8 took advantage of that and you know when I first started I was a student and  
9 my father was sort of hinting not saying directly that maybe I should do  
10 something like that to earn some extra money I said I'm not going to once I go  
11 into that situation its difficult to get out of it and so I ended up finding  
12 myself a Saturday job in a shoe shop and you know in those days  
13 this is more than twenty years ago that didn't happen you know but I was  
14 quite happy I found that you weren't doing anything that could be  
15 considered immoral or not very and I had to reassure my parents  
16 all the time it doesn't mean I'm going to run off or do anything

17 but you know the moral standards that you think I'm going  
18 to keep to and I appreciate those values just as much  
19 as you do and sometimes people are afraid

The cultural context is created by providing information about the expectations of the community. The respondent says that the community wanted women to stay at home in contrast to going out for work. This is warranted through her account of how she had to reassure her parents that she was not doing anything immoral by going to work (lines 14-15). Her account suggests that her community had negative views about women who went out to work and therefore did not encourage it. In lines 5-7 she points out that this is what has been the case historically. She says that the women of her mother's generation were unable to go out. Also she makes mention of the period of time she was referring to, namely more than twenty years ago (line 13). Moreover that not going out to work was also a family expectation is evident from her formulation of her father's expectation in lines 9 and 10. She says that her father wanted her to do similar work to her mother, namely working at home to get some extra money. In contrast to these expectations the participant goes on to do what she wanted. In line 12 she says she went out to work in a shoe shop. As the speaker herself said this could mean that the community could view her negatively. She had the potential of being considered 'immoral'. These issues are managed in the participant's account.

The participant before going on to talk about doing what she did constructs the nature of the work her mother's generation did as exploitative and as a dead-end-job by saying the following. In lines 2-3 she provides a contrast between the huge profits made by the manufacturers as opposed to the few pence per garment made by the worker. The extremes of the contrast emphasises the rightness of what the speaker is saying. Moreover historically it is well documented that working from home while advantageous in some ways such as, enabling the women to take care of their children and household also has a number of disadvantages such as insecurity of employment, low wages, boredom, isolation, overall lack of employment protection

and so on (Brah, 1994, Saifullah Khan, 1979, Bisset and Huws, 1984 and Allen and Wolkowitz, 1987). So the participant is drawing on a culturally available information to support her views of what she thought about working at home. She also provides additional information that it was the workers' own community who exploited them. She also argues that once someone started doing such a job they were confined to it. The implication being that other opportunities are not available to them. What her portrayal of the work done by her mother's generation in this way does is to justify what she did. Her going out to work is seen as a necessary consequence of avoiding such exploitative work. Further the participant also explicitly states that she was not doing anything immoral.

So in this extract we identify that context construction includes both information about the expectations of the family as well as an evaluative account of the type of job opportunities available to their parents' generation. The background information thus provided stands as an explanation for why the participant chose to do what she did.

Similarly in the next extract the participant talks about why she chose to become a bank officer instead of doing clerical work like all her cousins.

#### Extract 4

#### **Indian H.S.M.W.S1**

- 1 N I don't know everyone else has said most of what I was about to say. I think I  
2 had the same reasons for working and partly there's then the way I was raised  
3 was were always taught the girls in our family that we were not less than any  
4 man and you have to stand on your own feet the world is changing you can't  
5 be sure that your marriage will last somebody's going to be there to look after  
6 you all your life there was part of that I was definitely interested  
7 in I wanted to be independent I wanted to go in the mornings be  
8 a good girl and get ten rupees or ten pounds and be nice for  
9 that period of time but that was important that's how it started  
10 I so when you first decided to get a job itself was there somebody you already  
11 said there was someone who encouraged it was mostly your family who  
12 encouraged you then  
13 N It wasn't explicit as such you know like a a person or my family encouraging  
14 me it was like it was always understood that we should work but we were not  
15 told what kind of job we had to do and in those days I was much younger and

16 quite a bit of a snob so I was quite determined that I shouldn't become a clerk  
 17 and that was all I knew I didn't know what I would become but I knew what I  
 18 wouldn't become because all my cousins were clerks you know when I visited  
 19 them they were nice people I'm not putting down the work I'm not looking  
 20 down on but I always used to see them carrying files or making tea and I was  
 21 determined I'm not going to carry anybody's files to anybody's table you know  
 22 they did important work I love them I respect the work but I was determined  
 23 I'm not going to that because it was very feminine you know you're a woman  
 24 and you make tea for the men in the office so I wasn't and that was in India at  
 25 that time maybe nowadays clerks in India don't make tea maybe think

((group laughter))

26 I we don't know

27 N but I knew I'm not going to do that I'm not going to make tea for anyone or I  
 28 went around writing bank entrances I was lucky enough to get a job in the  
 29 first one I wrote so I was I didn't try at any time I joined straight in as an  
 30 officer I was there for seven and a half years before I came to Edinburgh.

N informs us that the all her cousins did clerical work. She then goes on to describe the work in very significant ways. In line 20 she says that it involves carrying files and making tea. She also says that it was feminine work (line 23-24). She further argues that making tea is expected in the office situation because of being a woman. So in this way N evaluates clerical work as women's work. N's construction of clerical work in this way can be argued to be based just on her prejudiced view. That this is the kind of common view held about clerks/secretaries is brought out in a number of studies such as Pringle (1994). Pringle quotes a senior executive of a company as defining secretary as a woman who works for another man in the company. So secretaries are all supposed to be women who work for bosses who are all supposed to be men. That N is oriented to her view as being not accurate is obvious from what she says in her account. She portrays the evaluation of her cousins' clerical work as based on personal knowledge. In line 18 she talks of visiting them at work. She further mentions what she observed them doing. In line 20 she says 'I always used to see them carrying files or making tea'. So in this way her evaluation is formulated to be accurate. Based on her evaluation N is then determined not to do this work. She says that she went on to get a bank officers job. So N's portrayal of clerical work as gender-biased stands as the explanation for why

she chose to become a bank officer.

However N's formulation has the potential for her to be viewed as prejudiced. By saying so emphatically about not wanting to do clerical work she could be seen as prejudiced. It could be interpreted by her listeners that she considered this type of work as beneath her. N minimises the attribution of prejudice by specifying that this was something she felt in the past and when she was much younger. In lines 15 and 16 she says 'in those days I was much younger and quite a bit of a snob'. Further each time she puts down clerical work she produces a disclaimer whose content suggests that she is not really putting down her cousins or their work before going on to state what she disliked about the work. In lines 19-20 she says, 'they were nice people I'm not putting down the work I'm not looking down on but I always used to see them carrying files or making tea'. In lines 22-23 she says, 'they did important work I love them I respect the work but I was determined I'm not going to that'. The disclaimers therefore work to minimise the negative implications of the prejudiced statements she made.

Moreover the reasons N gave for not choosing clerical work is also in keeping with her family values of equality and independence for women and her own desire for independence. In lines 3-5 N says that the girls in her family were taught that they were not 'less than any man', 'you have to stand on your own feet', 'the world is changing you can't be sure your marriage will last somebody's going to be there to look after you all your life'. So in this way she portrays that girls were asked not to be dependent on men. In lines 6-7 she talks of being interested and wanting to be independent. Since N provides this reason at the very start of her accounting her later formulation of not wanting to do women's work has the possibility of being offered a sympathetic hearing by her listeners since it is in keeping with her family expectation.



## Personal abilities as the basis for doing work

In the next extract the participant formulates her decision to do hairdressing as a consequence of her personal abilities. However her parents' expectations for her are different.

Extract 5

African H.S.M.W.S1

1 T ahm I went to school didn't mind till the last two years (laughter) when it got  
2 serious also you know it was quite an autocratic school didn't really bit more  
3 attention I think all of us could have done a lot better anyway my parents  
4 didn't give me the option of going to get a job straightaway they said I had to  
5 go to college and do something and I the careers advice we got was slightly  
6 better than my sister my sister wanted to be a fashion designer they told  
7 to be a machinist because in the town I was brought up in there was lots of  
8 (plat) factories and clothes factories and things they said oh go  
9 and be a machinist you know patting her on the head the teacher  
10 did at that time but with me they just give a load of books  
11 because I said oh I fancy being a make-up artist working  
12 in the theatre (laughter) and I really I liked the idea of being around  
13 sort of thing but not being out front just being near it enough and I was  
14 relatively arty I was good at copying things not very creative I think anyway  
15 could have made an ok one ahm so I did a hairdressing and beauty course my  
16 parents weren't pleased because they didn't think that hairdressing was very  
17 good they both worked in factories thats what they were brought here for and  
18 they wanted us all to do no way were we going near factories we were getting  
19 education we were going to do better than that so they weren't pleased  
20 because they thought it was a down market job and but I did it and  
21 I enjoyed it and I was quite good at different aspects of it and  
22 found out I was quite good at chemistry and things like that.

T describes herself as having particular abilities, namely being relatively arty, good at copying things (lines 14). She also says that she was not very creative. Her description stands as an explanation for why she chose to do a hairdressing course. That her choice was to do with her abilities is reinforced by her further statement in line 21 that she was quite good at different aspects of it (hairdressing). She also says that she found out that she had other abilities such as being good at chemistry (line 22). Inserted between the two accounts of how she chose to do hairdressing because of her abilities is an account of her parents' displeasure of her choice. The

sequential positioning of the account of her parents' displeasure between her accounts of choosing hairdressing on the basis of ability suggests that the account is significant to her formulation of choice. What this inserted account provides is information about her parents' social position, namely factory workers and their expectations regarding what they wanted their children to become. Her statement that they wanted them to do better implies that her parents' expectation was that they would not remain in the same social status as they were. She also mentions that her choice does not meet their expectation. This comes across from her statement that they considered hairdressing as a 'downmarket job' (line 20).

So why does the participant mention her parents' negative assessment of the work she did. Probably mentioning that hairdressing could be seen as low status work and talking of her parents' expectations works towards discounting inferences that she could only do this type of work because of her background or because this was what was expected of her by her family. It reinforces that she does hairdressing only because she liked it and because she had the abilities to do it. It also suggests that hairdressing is something which requires particular skills. Her account in this way manages the class implications of hairdressing work. It could also be argued that talking of abilities and skills gives hairdressing work a different status. It is interesting how she talks of being good at chemistry (line 22). It definitely suggests that there is more to doing hairdressing than what is usually assumed. In this way character-building work not only explains why she did particular work but also manages the class implications of doing such work.

Summarising the five extracts we observe that participants construct their backgrounds in very specific ways to explain the cultural context within which they made their choice. The cultural context was constructed through lists and also drawing on available cultural understandings. Thus participants treated certain work as exploitative and certain work as low status. They then used this to argue why they

chose only the work that they wanted to do. So in this way participants formulate themselves as having choice. Even in situations where they were seen as compromising with family expectations as in extracts (1) and (2) the respondents managed to downplay the implications of the compromise.

## **DOWNPLAYING THE IMPORTANCE OF MAKING A CHOICE**

Sometimes when participants talked of how they came to do particular work or how they started working they downplayed the importance of choice. We consider how and why participants do this.

### **Extract 6**

#### **Indian H.S.S. S.2**

- 1 **I** I mean when you first like started deciding to get a job itself, was it your  
2 decision to work, to think of looking for a work, was it the family or, I mean,  
3 who influenced the choice of work, would you say  
4 **R** I think in my family it's always been an emphasis on education, and  
5 then it's the professional qualification. Ahm, be a professional.  
6 **I** mm  
7 **R** But then that's the traditional Indian view  
8 **I** mm  
9 **R** Isn't it: doctor, accountant, lawyer, type thing. A, so when I was going to  
10 university, it was my mum my dad was like you know, "do something that  
11 you'll have something at the end of it". I was interested in  
12 English, in literature, something like that. And it was like, why  
13 do you want to do that for? ((I: slight laughter)) So it's like, okay,  
14 a, why don't you think about being an accountant, or doing  
15 accountancy, and it's like, you know, okay, I'll do that, because I, school  
16 was fine, got my exams, no problem, could have done anything really  
17 **I** okay  
18 **R** what I wanted to do, and then the question was, which university, and of  
19 course nice Indian girls don't leave home ((I: slight laughter)), but I go on to  
20 university. So I got a place in Edinburgh and Aberdeen  
21 and Glasgow, and then it was like, you got in Edinburgh, so just stay  
22 **I** stay at home ((slight laughter))  
23 **R** stay at home, yah, but then it's, I am oldest as well.  
24 **I** Yah  
25 **R** my brother is bit two years younger and for him it has always been easier  
26 because mum and it's okay, so it's he is like a boy and he is  
27 younger, so he can just, that's fine we'll go to Aberdeen, he was allowed to do  
29 whatever he wants to do. And so he's now on work, he's he's graduated and  
30 has his own business, because that's what he wants to do. But

31       having said that, looking back at it  
32 **I**    Yah  
33 **R**    I suppose in the end, it's been, there is the choices were the right choices, but  
34       perhaps not my choices, but then I would have been totally now if I didn't do  
35       what I did do.

In this extract we find R contrasting parental interest with her interest. R also portrays that this occurs in two situations one relating to what type of work to do and the other relating to where to go for higher studies. In both the accounts R states her personal interest. With respect to studies R wanted to do English literature (line 12) With respect to where to study R points out that she had a choice of going out of Edinburgh to study. By contrast her parents wanted her to do a professional course like accountancy, medicine and so on (lines 9-11). They also wanted her to stay at home and study (line 19). In both instances R decides to do what her parents wanted.

However R's construction can portray her as having no choice. R's account orients to this possibility and it is managed in her accounting. We find that R portrays her 'not choosing' literature as a consequence of being part of a particular culture. In lines 4-9 we have her account of how Indians place emphasis on getting a professional qualification. She also lists examples of the professional qualifications, one of which is accountancy. So in this way she ascribes an important role to tradition. It can be argued that ascribing such a role to tradition not only downplays the significance of choice it also minimises the negative implications arising from 'not choosing'. Further in R's account the role played by her parents is also accounted for in such a way that they are not seen as forcing her to do things. She portrays her parents' role in the decision she made as merely offering suggestions. She says that her parents asked her to do something which will be useful. According to her they asked her to do that would give her something at the end (lines 10-11). Further her parents' response to her wanting to do English literature is accounted for as though they were exhibiting incomprehension at her choice and not as if they were reacting strongly. She reports that her parents just

asked 'why do you want to do that for' (lines 12-13). So her parents are seen to be merely querying about what she would gain from doing literature. Her earlier information of her parent's expectation also reinforces to the listener that her parent's query is merely in keeping with what they had been suggesting from the beginning. So their reaction is not something out of the ordinary. Moreover her reporting of her parents' reaction is done in a light-hearted way. This can be argued for from the way in which her statement is greeted with slight laughter by the interviewer.

Finally R does some character-building work for herself. She constructs herself as capable of doing anything. She says in lines 14-15 'school was fine, got my exams, no problem, could have done anything really'. Her portrayal of herself in this way further downplays the importance of choice. It is implied that choice is an issue for only those who can do anything. Further in her summarising statement R suggests that doing what her parents suggested is still choice. She does modify her account to state that it may not be her personal choice but discounts its significance by stating that it was a good thing that she did it and that she did benefit from it. She says in lines 31-33 'I suppose in the end, it's been, there is the choices were the right choices, but perhaps not my choices, but then (where) I would have been totally now if I didn't do what I did do'. By talking of doing what her parents suggested in this way R avoids her parents from being considered blameworthy. Moreover it also avoids herself from being seen as submissive. Just prior to making the summarising statement R gives an account of the different ways in which she and her brother were treated. She says that she as a girl was not allowed to do certain things which her brother was, namely leaving home and going outside to study. Her portrayal suggests to the listener that R was indeed forced to compromise on choice. R minimises the significance of her statement by pointing out another reason for not being allowed to go out, namely being the older sibling of the house. It is generally understood that younger children are treated more leniently than older children. R's



suggesting the second reason takes away the focus from gender bias. Summarising the analysis we see that R, by portraying her 'not choosing' as a consequence of her culture and background, by constructing her parents' role in the decision-making as merely suggestive and by downplaying the importance of choice through character-building work discounts the relevance of making a choice. She also re-characterises the way in which choice is understood by stating that doing what is suggested by parents is also choice.

The significance of choice was also discounted by participants in other ways. One of the ways in which participants discounted the importance of choice was to construct their entry into work as something which 'just happened'.

Extract 7

**Pakistani H.S.M.W.S 1**

- 1 I We are just going through what work we do and when you first started  
2 working why did decide to go to work so that's where we were probably you  
3 could tell us something  
4 S Oh gosh I don't think I had a choice in the matter (group laughter). Well I  
5 married and came here in '85 my in-laws all had retail outlets  
6 so I was just part of it just go and do it like everybody  
7 else was doing initially it was very hard being brought up in  
8 Pakistan and never had anything my father used to do  
9 everything all I used to do was study it was very difficult having a child  
10 straightaway was even worse because I had to leave my baby go to work and I  
11 didn't like it and but I suppose you have to do for financial reasons and then  
12 now I don't think I can sit at home because its being away but sometimes I do  
13 feel guilty because I do neglect my kids lots of times being your own business  
14 its not easy and where we are we really really manufacture distribute all over  
15 U.K which is not easy whatever I can do I help my husband and so that's the  
16 way I look at it but it has given me a lot of things as well at least I can go out  
17 and do things now that I probably couldn't do before and

S states that she found it difficult to go to work. She provides background information of her upbringing and her responsibilities of motherhood to warrant for her difficulties. Thus in lines 8-9 she says that everything was done for her by her father. In lines 9-10 she discusses the difficulties of leaving a small baby and going to work. What S's account of her difficulties does is to portray her as being forced

into doing things. S does orient to this. She therefore says a number of things which addresses the situation. Right at the start of the interview when the interviewer asks S about why she decided to go to work S replies in line 4 'Oh gosh I don't think I had a choice in the matter'. S produces the statement in a light-hearted way. That this is light-hearted is inferred from the way in which her statement is greeted with laughter by her listeners. In this way at the very beginning of her response S minimises the implications of her statement, namely having no choice. S then goes on to portray her entry into work in a very matter of fact way. Her account is worked up to describe her entry into work as something which 'just happened' as part of a course of events. A number of things she says contributes to such a build-up in her accounting.

She provides background information of the context within which she went to work, namely her marrying into a business family (line 5). She then adds that she did it just like 'everybody' else (line 6). The use of the extreme case formulation 'everybody' (Pomerantz, 1986) further suggests that going to work in this way was the normal and ordinary thing to do. Thus what this portrayal of her entry into work as something which 'just happened' does is downplaying the significance of choice for her type of circumstances. Wooffitt (1992) and Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) have argued that describing something as just 'happened' can be used to indicate the absence of agency. Here the purpose is to point out that neither was the participant forced into work nor did she deliberately choose to go into the family business. Finally S also points out the advantages of the situation. According to her work has given her lots of things such as enabling her to go out and do things which she would not have done if she had not worked (lines 16-17). She also explicitly states that her preference is for working over non-working. In line 12 she says that she can't just 'sit at home'. Describing her current preference to work and what she has gained by working enables S to overcome the implications of having no choice from her earlier accounts of hardship. The type of conversation strategy that the participant uses here

is autobiographical accounting where hardships are talked about but then presented as being overcome. In the following extract also the participant talks of her decision to work as part of the natural course of events.

Extract (8)

**African H.S.M.W.S1**

- 1 **I** thank you one of the things that I was going to ask is not particularly with this  
2 job but when you first started working itself what is it that  
3 made you to decide to take up the job was it your decision or  
( a few turns later after two other women had said why they decided to work)  
4 **M** do want me to say why I'm nursing ((laughter))  
5 **I** or why you started on the job first job you didn't  
6 **M** that's fine I didn't start off nursing I didn't like school very much and when I  
7 left school I worked in an office  
8 **I** ok  
9 **M** and the school I went to produced ahm three lots of people people who  
10 worked in offices service or insurance offices and then you did teaching or  
11 nursing and then you went to university and that was all that was the  
12 careers guidance you were slotted into one of those and they kept saying I  
13 should be a nurse I should be a nurse and I was a very difficult child and I  
14 didn't want to be a nurse I was very difficult adolescent I was going through  
15 you know if someone pushed me to do something I wouldn't do it so I  
16 started working in an office and was so boring and I could see these  
17 idiot men coming into the office boys and they were being pushed on and  
18 they were just being pushed on because they were men and I thought I'm  
19 not staying here that's when I decided I would do nursing a lot of my family  
20 were nursing and I never never wanted to teach ahm and that was really why  
21 I did nursing because I couldn't really think of anything else ahm I  
22 think if careers guidance had been in sixties as it had been as it is now  
23 presumably I would be nursing twenty six years

M is a nurse and she provides an account of how she finally came to do nursing after doing office work. M's entry into office work and her leaving it are formulated as influenced by her personality. Thus her refusal to take up nursing in the first place is formulated in terms of the contrast between her personality and the character of career guidance she was offered. In her explanation M describes the career guidance that she was offered as directive. They are portrayed as pressurising her to do nursing (line 13). The directive nature of career guidance comes across from her statement that individuals were 'slotted' into one of three careers, namely teaching, nursing or clerical work. Contrasting this is the type of person she was.

She describes herself as a 'difficult child' a 'difficult adolescent' and as 'someone who won't be pushed into things' (lines 13-15). So in this way she constructs an identity for herself as someone who can't be forced into things. That this is her nature is reinforced by her mentioning that this is how she was as a child and an adolescent. If she did not say that she was a difficult child her difficult behaviour could just be attributed to adolescent behaviour. But now it is accounted for as her identity. So we find portrayal of a tension between her identity and the directive nature of career guidance.

Then she moves from the office job to nursing. The office situation is constructed in such a way that it can be blamed for her wanting to leave and do something else. Now she brings in gender discrimination as the reason for her moving out of office work (lines 16-19). She then takes the decision to leave. Bringing in gender discrimination allows her the flexibility to account for her change of work without in anyway undermining the kind of identity she has constructed for herself. However now N goes back to the work that she had rejected in the first place. This can create difficulties for her. Her character building work can be undermined by her going back. These implications are managed in different ways. N does not make a big deal about going back to a career which she had earlier decided not to do. She accounts for going back to nursing in a matter-of-fact way. She states that she started nursing because it was something which others in the family were doing. In lines 19-20 she says 'a lot of my family were nursing'. She also states that she didn't like teaching which then implies that the only option left for her was nursing. Thus through a process of formulating complaints against specific situations she had to face such as career guidance and her office environment and contrasting them with her identity constructed in a particular way and by further portraying change in a matter-of-fact way M manages to account for why she chose to do particular things or move from one job to another.

## WORKING FOR A LIVING - IS IT CHOICE?

In the next two extracts some of the participants talk of going to work because they had to earn a living or due to financial necessity.

Extract (9)

**African H.S. M.W. S1**

- 1 **I**      thank you one of things that I was going to ask is not particularly  
2      with this job but when you first started working itself what is it that  
3      made you to decide to take up the job was it your decision or  
4 **G**      that's going back a long time for me I remember thinking shall I work or  
5      shan't I work it seemed like I needed to earn my living and so the question  
6      really was how not I mean work or not its always been that way I've  
7      always been actually the main provider for my family and I'm too old now  
8      well I make jokes about having face lift and liposuction so that I can sell  
9      my body ((laughter)) I expect to have a professional role until I'm sixty five.  
(a number of turns later)  
10 **MT** when I came here I followed my husband who came as a student  
11      before that I have been working in Sudan for say about ten years or so  
12      automatically after coming here I felt like doing something so my husband  
13      being student have to do something to help to support the family so I started  
14      say creche advisor at the R centre actually a friend introduced us to the  
15      R centre and I was there first I was volunteer for one year then as a paid  
16      worker for two years and then I went for my nursing adaptation course at  
17      the Royal Infirmary four months after that I started work as a staff nurse

Both G and MT state that they went to work because of their circumstances. In line 7 G mentions being the main provider for the family. In line 13 MT says that she had to work to support the family. Here earning a living is treated as something that the participants had to do because of their circumstances. However the interviewer's question was about whose decision it was to start working. Therefore working for necessity could portray a lack of options and therefore a lack of choice. Both G and MT's accounts of how they started working are constructed in such a way that working for a living can still be seen as something which they chose to do.

G's account of how she started working begins with some reminiscing. In



lines 4-5 she talks about how she herself debated about whether or not to work. Through this process of thinking G arrives at the conclusion that she had to earn her living. Her portrayal of making a decision to work through a process of thinking and reflection downplays the implications that she had no choice and was forced into work. Moreover accompanying her statement that she had to earn a living with the phrase 'it seemed like' is interesting. The use of the words 'seemed like' opens the possibility that it need not be the case. In this sense earning a living is presented as something highly contingent on her knowledge and desires (Latour and Woolgar, 1986, see also Edwards and Potter 1992). G then goes on to state that having decided that she had to earn a living the issue of whether to work or not became irrelevant. What became relevant for her is how to find work. Possibly G's re-formulation of what is an issue for her and what is not is way of conveying to the interviewer that the interviewer's question about choice is irrelevant for her. G then proceeds to do some character-building for herself as the main provider. She mentions the length of time that she had played the role (lines 6-7). So her needing to work is portrayed as something she did as a result of being in a position of responsibility, namely the main provider for the family. This also works towards discounting any negative inference that G was forced to work because of her circumstance.

In MT's account also we see similar things. MT provides some information which suggests to the listener that working was something that MT had herself expected to do. In lines 11-12 MT provides information that she worked earlier for ten years and so working in Britain was something she did 'automatically'. That work was something she entered into naturally is also reinforced by MT's further account of how she moved from one job to another, got qualified and finally became a staff nurse. MT's account of her personal interest to work and her portrayal of entering into work willingly downplays any inference which could be made that she

had no choice because she had to work due to financial necessity.

In the following extract also one of the participants talks about necessity as one of the reasons she chose to work. She too downplays the inference that working for necessity means lack of choice by portraying that she went into work as part of the natural course of events. However the interviewer still suggests that working for necessity should not be considered as choice. The respondent says a number of things to repair the kind of inference that the interviewer has drawn based on her earlier accounting.

Extract 10

**Indian.L.S.M.W.S1**

- 1 J ahm I started when I came to this country soon after ahm you know back  
2 home is completely different story than here here you are here on your own  
3 there is no sometimes there is no family supports and anything to met to meet  
4 you have to work especially in this country because its so expensive so that  
5 was my first job in 1976 I used to work in one of the clothing  
6 factory and they used to make uniforms and I used to design  
7 the clothes designs are not then had a family and then in 1990  
8 I took this job as ethnic librarian children are getting a little big  
9 and I thought it will be nice if I can do a couple of hours get  
10 out from the house and meet other people and the community  
11 N like I came to this country 1971 got married and I was housewife most of the  
12 time because I had small children and then I started this job because the  
13 children were grown up there was nothing much to do at home so I did lot of  
14 voluntary work before before I had a job just going here and there attending  
15 meetings and contact people and then I started paid job. First I started with  
16 roundabout International Centre  
17 I Ok so what did you do there  
18 N I was community worker there so I did few years there and then I then I was  
19 self employed again we had our own business so I helped my husband then  
20 M.offered me a job  
21 I ok  
22 N in 1991 and I'm working since then  
23 I ok did anyone else choose for any other reason or  
24 P same I came here in 1986 at that time I was quite busy with the family and in  
25 1992 my mother-in-law passed away and I didn't have anything to do so I  
26 started working then  
27 T I started when we came to this country '72 and I was working for Philips  
28 I ok  
29 T this was before marriage

30 **I** aha  
 31 **T** and after marriage I was still working for another firm in the accounts  
 32 secretarial side then I had the family  
 33 **I** so was it Philips here or  
 34 **T** in England  
 35 **I** in England ok  
 36 **T** and after marriage I had the chil well I was working still but once I was  
 37 expecting the children so I was a full time housewife  
 38 once the children started growing up I started working parttime  
 39 and now to full time  
 40 **I** ok so its been a time for changing  
 41 **All** yes yes  
 42 **I** everybody has  
 43 **N** with a choice not force not with any force  
 44 **I** and sometimes necessity  
 45 **J** I won't call it a force I won't call it a force but you have different reasons for  
 46 doing the job  
 47 **P** different circumstance  
 48 **J** different circumstances different you know because that time it was different  
 49 altogether aha but it wasn't a I won't call it a force I just call it my own choice  
 50 it will be nice what you going to do I that time I didn't have any children or  
 51 anything so what I'm going to do all day home

J portrays her entry into work as something which happened as part of the natural course of events. J's explanation for starting to work is formulated as a consequence of her circumstances. She lists a number of things about her situation in Britain such as being on her own, lack of family support and everything being expensive (lines 2-4) to support her view that she had to work because of her circumstances. She contrasts with the situation in her country of origin to argue that circumstances in Britain were different. She say in lines 1-2 that 'back home is completely different story than here'. However J's account of her circumstances could be heard as an account of her hardships. A further consequence of which is that J's work in the clothes factory could be seen as something which she had to do because of necessity and not because she wanted to. Moreover J's account contrasts with another reason that the other respondents and J give for working, namely going to work after children were grown-up (lines 7-8, 13, 25- 26, 38-39). In the light of this other reason there is a further possibility that J's account could be viewed as being forced to work because of necessity. That J's account could be viewed in this

way is argued from what happens later on in the accounting.

After reasons for working is provided by everyone, one of the participants produces a summing up statement that they all went to work 'with a choice not force' (line 43). However the interviewer states that sometimes working is a necessity (line 44). The sequential placing of the interviewer's comment just after a number of participants have spoken of working after their children have grown-up suggests that circumstances other than this are being referred to. Because it is only J who talked of another reason for going to work the interviewer's comment also suggests that it is J's work in the clothes factory which is referred to as working for necessity. Moreover the comment coming right after one of the participants had said that they worked with a choice also suggests that the interviewer does not consider J's work in the clothes factory as something she did with a choice. The interviewer makes this comment inspite of the fact that J in her accounting had downplayed any inference that she did not have a choice by portraying her going to work in the clothes factory as something which was merely the consequence of different circumstances. The interviewer's assumption that working for necessity implies lack of choice is addressed by J in the next turn.

J explicitly states that her going to work in the clothes factory was for different reasons. In lines 45-46 J says 'I won't call it a force I won't call it a force but you have different reasons for doing the job'. J's statement discounts any implication that she went to work because she had no choice. J also formulates her going to work in the clothes factory as good and also as the logical thing to do in her circumstances. She says in lines 50-51 'it will be nice what you going to do I that time I didn't have any children or anything so what I'm going to do all day home'. In this way J discounts that working for economic reasons or necessity should not be seen as lack of choice or as a force.

Summarising the analytic findings of extracts (9) and (10) we observe that

participants work towards discounting the implications that working for a living means having no choice. The participants do this through a variety of devices such as portraying working for a living as something which the individual had decided upon, providing other reasons along with economic reasons and through stating that working for a living is a consequence of different circumstances.

### **ROLE ASCRIBED TO INFLUENCES BY EARLIER STUDIES**

Participants when asked whether the decision to work was theirs or influenced by others, always described the context within which their decision to work was made. In our theoretical discussion at the beginning of the chapter we presented three main influences on ethnic minority women's entry into the labour market, namely culture, historical and economic factors such as effects of migration and race and gender discrimination. Apart from race discrimination all the other influences were used in the participants' construction of the context within which their decision to work and/or choice of specific work was made. The influences participants spoke of were: cultural restrictions, the consequences of migration and living in a new environment, family and community expectations and gender discrimination in the work place. Before going on to discuss the ways in which influences were used and negotiated in the participants' accounts we briefly mention how they have been understood in a number of earlier studies.

Many discussions of ethnic minority womens' entry into the labour market such as Parmar (1982) and Brah (1994) present cultural, structural, political and ideological influences impacting on ethnic minority womens' choice to work as limiting their opportunities to work and also to finding suitable work. Such a focus assumes that the structural influences are of a particular nature and form or in other words they consider them to be solid fixed realities. The consequences of such treatment of influences as limiting or restrictive or as forcing is that it hoists on the



ethnic minority women certain negative identities. It presents them as having no choice. That this is the general case for all women is brought out through Holland's (1980) explicit statement, namely that occupational choice as such does not exist for women. Moreover the understanding that women can do only the work they are permitted to or that they are forced into particular work by circumstances such as financial necessity fosters the idea that women do not really gain much out of working. Warrior (1988) and Westwood (1988), in their studies of minority women, found that most women were in jobs because of financial necessity and that the women saw work merely as an extension of their roles as wife and mother. There have been other points of view such as Jahoda's (1979) argument that employment offers individuals a number of consequences apart from the obvious consequence, namely earning a living. According to her work offers individuals the following, time structure, shared experiences and contacts with people outside the family, links individuals with goals and purposes that transcend their own, defines aspects of personal status and identity, and enforces activity. So employment has been suggested as having very important functions. However Jahoda's (1979, 1981) theory of employment has been criticised for assuming that it is applicable to everyone irrespective of gender and race. Llewellyn and Osborne (1990) argue that since women's entry into work is influenced by a number of factors it is not actually appropriate to suggest that work offers individuals far more than just the means for living. So in this way they discount the significance of Jahoda's theory with respect to women. Yet the findings of the fairly recent study undertaken by Bachu (1988) of Sikh women's participation in the labour market resonates with what Jahoda has said. Bachu found that for Sikh women employment has resulted in the increase in women's autonomy and decision making powers. She further argues that employment has also brought about changes in the culturally defined notions of sexual roles within the fabric of Punjabi society. Her findings suggest that even if

the women went to work because of financial necessity it resulted in offering them much more than just monetary compensation. So the two issues of concern which come out of these theoretical formulations are whether ethnic minority women make 'real' choices when they go for work and whether going into work within limiting circumstances provides them any benefits.

Our participants' accounts orient to the understanding that influences on their decision to work are usually viewed as restricting them. However participants used this understanding of influences to do character-building work for themselves in their accounts. Instead of treating the influences as restricting them, participants treated the influences as interactional resources. Thus in extracts 1-5 we observed that influences such as cultural norms, expectations of the families were formulated as difficulties and then participants went on to portray themselves as overcoming the difficulties. They also portrayed themselves as doing things other than the prescribed norm. So in this way participants created particular identities for themselves. Let us consider a variety of formal situations where background information is given. For example speakers in a conference, subject authors, usually provide some background information before launching into what they have to say. The purpose of this we can argue is to ensure that the listener understands where the speaker or the writer is coming from and how they wish to engage the attention of the listener on the topic. This is precisely what happens in the accounts we have analysed in this chapter. By providing background information the speakers focus the attention of the listener/s in a specific way. So what becomes relevant is the information provided by the speaker. Thus when the participants constructed their culture in specific ways it suggested to the listener that this was what they should understand about their cultural situation. So in this way context construction became a useful tool for enabling the speakers to perform particular interactional tasks. In this case it helped the participants to portray themselves as negotiators or as exceptions to the

general case.

Further the formulation of the various influences were based on existing cultural understandings such as the characteristics of their community, the history of minority employment, gender bias, the roles of career guidance and so on. The usefulness of drawing on already existing understandings has been discussed by a number of researchers. Cohen (1985) discusses that history is malleable and is dependent on subjective interpretations. According to him drawing on the past helps individuals to describe complex and ideological messages. Further the cultural resources brought in for context construction are usually understandings which are considered as shared by the participants. However Antaki (1998) has argued that background knowledge of what the cultural resource is is not really important. Antaki discusses this with an example. He focuses on the how the word 'Fagin' a fictional English character is used in the conversational context. He says that even without the knowledge of how Fagin appears in the English novel, readers can understand its significance from focusing on how it makes its appearance in the interactional context. Therefore for Antaki the reader does not require to have a knowledge of who Fagin is in English Literature. However there is a problem with such a claim. It is precisely because the individuals involved in the conversation share a mutual cultural understanding of what Fagin is, the information is brought into the conversation. Moreover having a shared cultural knowledge of who Fagin was adds to what the participants make of it in the interactional context. What we would therefore like to argue is that background knowledge of the cultural resource enhances our understanding of what is going on in the interactional context. For example it has been pointed out earlier how information of number of girls in the family and the participant's position by order of age among them adds to the participant's construction of her family and community not encouraging women to work. From the sequential positioning of the information it was argued that its

purpose was to add something to the construction of family expectation. However if we do not bring in our cultural antenna we would have to stop here. Bringing in our knowledge of the cultural background adds to our understanding of why the information was offered and how it was then worked up in the interactional context. The findings of our analysis therefore suggests that when cultural resources are drawn in and used in accounting it is useful to have knowledge of their significance for that cultural context. This does not mean that we are advocating that these resources are fixed or that they have only one meaning. We are suggesting that the resources do come with some prior shape to the interactional context which is then further worked on and re-shaped as per the requirements of the interactional context.

Another consequence of the treatment of influences as restrictive is that it fosters the assumption that participants are not getting anything out of working because they are forced into doing it. It also imputes certain negative identities to them such as 'not having choice'. For example when participants mentioned that they worked because of financial necessity the immediate assumption was that they did not have a choice. Through using a number of conversation strategies participants were able to discount such understandings. What the above discussion is pointing out is that participants resist the fixed roles that influences are expected to play in their lives and also to determine it.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this chapter we first considered the different influences on ethnic minority women's decision to work. We then argued that these influences were portrayed as limiting ethnic minority women's entry into paid work. We then analysed the responses of the participants when asked about the influences on their decision to work. The analytic findings were that available cultural knowledge was brought to the conversation in some form and used, re-shaped according to the needs of the

interaction.. We discussed how participants formulated the influences to provide background information of the cultural context. We argued that the contrast produced between the description of the context and the participants' actions resulted in the creation of specific identities for them. We also discussed that participants discounted the relevance of deviant identities made available when they said that they worked for reasons such as financial necessity. So we argued that instead of viewing influences as restrictive as advocated by earlier studies we should consider them as conversation resources used by the participants to meet interactional needs. Thus our analytic findings suggest that influences are flexibly constructed, enabling participants to create identities, portray choice and make sense of their present situation. One of the interesting observations that we would like to make is that none of the participants mentioned racial discrimination as influencing either their entry into work or the type of work they did. This is particularly significant since racial discrimination is considered as one of the main reasons for why black women are unable to find appropriate work (Bruegal, 1994).

In the next chapter we address this gap. We consider how participants responded when they were specifically asked about their experiences of discrimination.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>*Purdah* is a series of norms and practices which limit women's participation in public life. The notion of *purdah* is most frequently associated with Muslim women. However in the Asian subcontinent notions of *purdah* are associated with Hindus and Sikhs too (Brah, 1992).



## **CHAPTER 6**

### **WORK AND DISCRIMINATION**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

As mentioned in the last chapter the focus of this chapter is how ethnic minority women account for the role of discrimination in their working lives. A number of studies such as Phizacklea and Miles (1980), Hoel (1982), Phizacklea (1983, 1988), Baxter and Raw (1988), Warrier, (1988) have argued that ethnic minority women face race and gender discrimination. While both ethnic minority women and white women experience discrimination in the labour market on the basis of gender, ethnic minority women are doubly disadvantaged because of their race. Our discussion in this analytic chapter begins by explaining some of the terms related to race and discrimination. We then proceed to discuss the ways by which earlier studies have dealt with the discriminatory experiences of ethnic minority women. We then start with analysing the accounts provided by the participants in response to the interviewer's question, as to whether they have faced discrimination at work.

#### **PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION**

"Prejudice is a negative attitude toward the members of some social group that is based solely on their membership to that group (Baron and Byrne, 1998). Prejudice towards others on the basis of gender is termed sexism. Sexism involves accepting gender stereotypes which suggest that males and females possess sharply different traits. Prejudice on the basis of race is termed racism. Giddens (1993:255) defines racism as a means of falsely attributing inherited characteristics of personality or behaviour to individuals of a particular physical appearance. He further states that a racist is someone who believes that a biological explanation can be given for characteristics of superiority or inferiority supposedly possessed by people of a given physical stock. Discrimination refers to the negative actions toward the objects of racial, ethnic, gender or religious prejudices. Nowadays we also hear of the terms

positive discrimination. This refers to the positive actions taken towards those who bear the brunt of prejudice. An example of this is the allocation of certain jobs for disadvantaged groups. Having clarified what particular terms mean we now turn our attention to describing some of the ways by which discrimination has affected ethnic minority women's working lives.

Discrimination affects the lives of ethnic minority women both at the point of entry into work and when they are in work. When we consider the kinds of discrimination faced by ethnic minority women at the point of entry into work, two things stand out. First, by virtue of being ethnic minority women, they are denied access to work itself. Second, these women are provided access to only particular kinds of work and not to others. Phoenix (1994) in her study of black and white young women from working class quotes personal accounts of her participants both black and white as expressing the view that individuals were denied work because of their being black. Parmar (1982) has pointed out that career officers in schools do not offer Asian girls the same interviews and job opportunities as white girls. This is because they are of the opinion that for Asian girls thinking about career is a waste of time. Parmar (1982) has also pointed out that the desirability of black and white women for work such as secretarial work, telephone receptionist work, hairdressing, and 'beauty therapy' which present women as visibly attractive to men varies. She argues that it is white women who are preferred for such work. A direct consequence of such thinking is that black women are considered to be suitable for work such as cleaners, domestics, nurses and cooks.. Carby (1982) mentions that West Indian women still migrate to the United States and Canada as domestics and in Britain black women are seen to be suitable for work as cleaners in offices, National Health service domestics and so on. Carby further argues that such a view stems from the earlier colonial history where the role of black women was confined to positions of servitude. Thus even within the service industry, where there is a

concentration of women, ethnic minority women are concentrated in the lowest-level jobs. Phizacklea (1994) has argued that black women are largely excluded from the 'professional and managerial' category. She provides an example of the National Health Service in Britain to support her case. She says that Caribbean women are predominantly in the nursing grades and white women are represented in the administrative grades. Phizacklea (1994) discusses that informal recruitment practices such as work acquired through word of mouth ensures that ethnic minority women do not get better work. She argues from her study of homeworking in Coventry that the better paid electronics homework carried out by white women in Coventry was brought home by their husbands working in the factories. She provides an example of investigation of recruitment practices at the Massey Fergusson plant in Coventry by the Council for Racial Equality. In this investigation indirect racial discrimination through the use of such informal recruiting practices were uncovered. Phizacklea (*op. cit.* 1994) further argues that although language deficiencies and lack of skills are usually provided as reasons for ethnic minority women not getting proper work, in reality this is not the case. She cites the findings of the last Policy Studies Institute's study of racial disadvantage at work to argue that language is less of a problem for ethnic minority women than is commonly thought (see also Brown, 1994).

Moreover once the women enter the labour market their experiences of discrimination do not stop. There are differences between black women and white women in terms of their salaries; chances of promotion for black women are curtailed, and they experience overt racism from their employers. Parmar (1982) cites the example of the Chix bubblegum factory in Slough where 96 Asian women went on strike on 10 October 1980. In this factory the wages for Asian women was 95p per hour and for white women it was £1.10 per hour. The personal account of one of the women working in the factory also attests to harassment by the

supervisors who were always white. Difference in pay between white and Asian workers was also noted in a study of women homeworkers in Coventry by Phizacklea (1994). Phizacklea found that two-thirds of the Asian women earned between 75p and £1.50 an hour compared to the white homeworkers who earned £2.00 an hour.

The exclusion of ethnic minority women from the labour market either on account of lack of access to work or to suitable work has the effect of making them take up options such as homeworking. Other options which are also available is working in the family business. While working in the family business could be through choice or in response to family ideologies, there are those who take it up because they are denied access to outside employment. Phizacklea (1988) points out that exclusion of ethnic minority women from the wider labour market forces them to be part of ethnic businesses. Within these businesses the women are subjected to patriarchal structures. Baxter and Raw (1988) also similarly argue that for Chinese women the changing economic situation and dependency has forced them to work within family businesses. Baxter and Raw describe that these women endure poor pay and long hours. That this is not desirable employment is suggested from the Chinese women's accounts themselves. The Chinese women whom Baxter and Raw interviewed said that they wanted their children to study better and not be confined to family businesses. A counter argument which is offered is that ethnic minority women choose to work within the family businesses because of the cultural constraints and the ideologies of sexuality within the black family. Carby (1982) argues that ideas of black female sexuality does not stem from within the black family. She says that this comes into being through racist construction.

Our discussion has pointed out that race and gender discrimination structure the lives of ethnic minority women. However as we mentioned in the last chapter none of the ethnic minority participants spoke of the influences of discrimination

when discussing their decision to work. It could therefore be argued that discrimination is possibly not relevant to the women's working lives. Nevertheless as Allen (1994) has pointed out, silence does not mean that the issue in question is irrelevant. Allen illustrates this with an example of a study done in Northern Ireland which showed that few of the individuals defined themselves in religious terms (see also Hutnik, 1992). Allen argues that the lack in the use of religion in defining themselves does not mean that religion is irrelevant to the individuals in Northern Ireland. She suggests that in situations of long-term conflict silence need not mean that the issue is irrelevant but rather that it is of vital importance to the individuals concerned. Within the context of Northern Ireland any identification in terms of religion could carry personal and social costs, and so silence could be a way of avoiding it. So in a similar way silence about discrimination when women accounted for their decision to work need not necessarily mean that it is not a relevant issue for ethnic minority women. There could be other reasons for them to stay silent.

So how did the participants in our study account for their experiences of discrimination. Participants responded to this question in a variety of ways. Some of our participants denied any experience of discrimination, others trivialised the experiences of discrimination, yet others accounted that they had experienced discrimination. It was also interesting that most of the time when the women discussed discrimination they mentioned racial discrimination. So reference to discrimination from now on should be read as 'racial discrimination'. If the reference is to other kinds of discrimination (e.g. gender discrimination) this will be specified.

## **DENYING PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION**

In the earlier section we have discussed that discrimination structures the lives of ethnic minority women. Therefore it was interesting when the respondents of the following extracts stated explicitly that they have not experienced discrimination.



Extract 1

**Pakistani.H.S.M.W.S1**

1 **X** As far I remember I haven't come across any racial discrimination  
2 because my work has been like that, you know, probably  
3 I haven't come through any sort of experience that I could  
4 describe here, because first I was working in a  
5 departmental store and my job was my job, you know, which I was doing.  
6 But my husband has come across it because he's quite qualified  
7 person and he is working where's no coloured person they keep.  
8 That's the only person my husband was coloured there and he  
9 worked it. He was expecting to have some promotion after  
10 his boss retired, and when his boss retired he couldn't get his  
11 promotion. That's where he could come discrimination and he was quite sad  
12 about that because he had been working hard there. But apart from that I  
13 haven't come across any discrimination, anybody else.

Extract 2

**Indian H.S.M.W.S1**

1 **L** Yes, I don't come across any discrimination either because the job that I'm  
2 into it you have to work with all the different cultures. So I have to get along,  
3 and nobody comes and tells me, "no you are different culture". The business  
4 that I'm doing is all over the world, as I said from the beginning, sixty three  
5 countries business running. So you can't, you must know how to deal with  
6 these people, you know, black or white, and they respect you the same way.  
7 So I haven't got, touch wood, so far.

In extracts (1) and (2) the participants state that they haven't faced discrimination. Having made this statement both participants go further to account for why they have not faced discrimination. Both of them say that lack of discrimination is a consequence of the nature of work that they do. In extract (1) the participant specifies that she worked in a departmental store. She then mentions that in this line of work each one does their own job. In line 5 she comments 'my job is my job'. What is implied is that she works independently and therefore does not face discrimination. However in department stores workers can be working independently in sales or on the counters but at the same time there could be a lot of interaction also between staff. What X does is to draw on a selective aspect of her work and portrays it as the salient part. The effect of which is that it supports her

earlier statement of lack of discrimination. Similarly in extract (2) the participant describes aspects of her work to account for not facing discrimination. She talks about working with different cultures (line 2). She provides details that the work is spread over a number of countries to support this claim. Moreover she portrays her job requirement as knowing how to deal with different people. She also states explicitly that no one comes and tells her that she belongs to another culture. Her description of her work and its requirements suggests that it is highly unlikely for her to face racial discrimination.

However the participants, by stating that their experience is tied to the particulars of their jobs, leave open the possibility that discrimination does exist. Indeed in extract (1) we find that the speaker describes that her husband has faced discrimination. Again his facing discrimination is explained by referring to the features of his work. She mentions two things, that her husband is highly qualified and that he is in a work where usually there are no coloured people. We have already discussed that there is the understanding that black/ethnic minority individuals are denied access to desirable jobs and are usually concentrated in low status work. So her statement implies that already he is in a place which is usually not available to ethnic minorities. Her mentioning the status of work of her husband sets the scene for her listeners to accept what she has to say further. She says that he was denied promotion. Her listeners will see discrimination as the cause for his lack of promotion. So in this way the participants explain why they haven't faced discrimination and why others have.

Similarly in extract (3) the participant draws on her past and present work situations to say that she has not faced discrimination.

Extract 3

**Pakistani. H.S.S.S1**

- 1 I What about the other projects you have worked with, have you ever faced  
2 discrimination on race or gender?

3 **R** Ahm, not really  
 4 **I** mm  
 5 **R** because the first one I worked for was a multicultural education centre  
 6 **I** mm mm  
 7 **R** so it was women only  
 8 **I** and the ethos was  
 9 **R** the ethos was very different. Here it is just the three of us (I: slight laughter).  
 10 There is myself, T and P, and the ethos again, I mean (I: clearing throat), you  
 11 know, there is a South Asian woman, a Lebanese woman and Irish, ahm the  
 12 ethos is very different in this organisation. Ahm, the one that I worked in  
 13 previously was different, because it was white project  
 14 **I** mm mm  
 15 **R** and my work was generic, but ahm and it was in one of the large peripheral  
 16 housing estates where I know they remind of the experience of racism that  
 17 people suffer. But I didn't have one.  
 18 **I** mm  
 19 **R** And I think that it was mainly to do with the position that I held, because I  
 20 was, it was about the fact that I was an institutional representative, and I had  
 21 the power of the education department behind me, and there was a very  
 22 interesting shift in dynamic, because I was working with like white people  
 23 living on a peripheral estate, very poor, ahm, very poorly educated because of  
 24 the system's failing them, no access into those systems or access to power,  
 25 because I had all those from my job. So, it was sort of like, you know, shift  
 26 **I** it was a shift  
 27 **R** in the dynamics, which was fascinating  
 28 **I** yah  
 29 **R** to see, because like, they didn't see the blackness in me, they saw the  
 30 power in me  
 31 **R** yah. So it was an incredible learning experience ((I: laughter)) as well.

R specifies that she has not faced discrimination because of race and gender. She mentions that her first job was in a multicultural education centre and that there were only women (lines 5-7). The implication being that she therefore cannot face discrimination. Her further mention of the ethos of the place supports this claim. In her second work she mentions the nationalities of all the three workers, including herself. She says that they are South-Asian, Lebanese and an Irish (line 11). So again it is implied that there cannot be discrimination because they are all multicultural. So just by talking about the features of the past and present work R allows it to be inferred that discrimination cannot be experienced. Accounting for lack of discrimination by drawing on the features of her work has the further function

of implying that she is only claiming lack in certain types of work.

R then produces a further reason for not facing discrimination in her first work. She begins by drawing a contrast between her occupational identity and the identity of the individuals she is working for. The identity of the individuals she worked with is constructed by mentioning their social and economic status (lines 22-24). Economically they are described as poor. Her mention of the areas where they live, namely a peripheral housing estate adds to this description. Socially they are described as poorly educated and powerless. Their powerlessness is warranted by mentioning their inability to access the benefits of the social structure. By contrast she says that she has power on account of her occupational identity. She mentions the well established government department she was part of and her own position in it, namely its representative to warrant for this position of power. The contrasting category constructions legitimise her claim that even though she is black she does not face discrimination from the white people on the estate. Potter (1996) has discussed that building of category entitlements focuses on the status of the reporter and does a number of things. It can be used by individuals to increase the plausibility of what they are accounting for. On the other hand alternate category constructions can be used to undermine any category entitlements that individuals may have. For example constructing the white people in the estate as powerless undermines the category entitlement which they are usually expected to have, namely power over black people.

However there is also the understanding that racism and discrimination is more in housing estates. So her account can be heard as an inaccurate portrayal of the situation. R is oriented to this. She addresses this by acknowledging that what she is describing is an exception. She explicitly states in line 29-31 that the power she had as a result of her occupational identity overruled the disadvantaged position she was in by virtue of being black. She finally provides an upshot of the experience

by stating that 'it was an incredible learning experience'. Gists or summaries and upshots or consequences are conversation devices by which speakers pick aspects of the prior account and re-present them (see Heritage and Watson, 1979). Gists and upshots can preserve, transform or delete aspects of the prior account (see also Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995: 98). Here in R's account the upshot by mentioning the consequence of her position of power works to preserve the exceptional character of her being in this position with respect to the white people she works with. Further her working with the understanding that discrimination does exist also suggests that lack of discrimination is not presented as the general case.

### **Re-characterising discrimination**

In the next extract the speaker begins with accounting for lack of discrimination as a consequence of her work. She then goes on to do something different to what the others in the earlier extracts do.

#### **Extract 4**

#### **Indian H.S.M.W.S1**

- 1 **Q** I haven't faced any discrimination because most of our work has been with,  
2 even if it has been with - some of it's been with white women, some - but the  
3 kind of discrimination that I feel sometimes, I feel in the kids' schools  
4 sometimes. I want to know why doesn't S, he keeps coming and asking me,  
5 why doesn't this one invite me or something, and I feel sometimes it's not  
6 discrimination it's more ignorance, you know. They don't know this and I just  
7 feel that all these Asians maybe they won't like to come, maybe they won't  
8 eat this, maybe they won't; so it's partially this, this ignorance on both parts  
9 rather than, you can't always say that it's I mean some people some people  
10 will be racist but its not always racism. I don't know I just but personally  
11 haven't really faced any.

In extract (4) Q denies experiences of discrimination (lines 1,10-11). She accounts for the lack as a consequence of the type of work she does. She does not explicitly state it but it is inferable from the statement she makes in line 2 that discrimination is not a feature of her work. She does mention later that even though she has worked with some white women she has not faced any discrimination. Her statement implies



that her work situation was possibly with other communities. So in this way Q discounts that in the work context there is no discrimination.

Q then goes on to say that there are other contexts where she has experienced discrimination. She provides an example of discrimination, namely her son not being invited by others friends in the school (lines 3-5). Having provided the example she goes on to discount it as discrimination. She re-characterises the experience of discrimination as 'ignorance' (line 6). She explains what she means by ignorance by providing examples of misconceptions they may have about Asians (lines 7-8). In this way she excuses that their behaviour cannot always be labelled as racism, it could mean something ordinary such as ignorance. She further adds to her argument by stating that such misconceptions can be held by both Asians and Whites. Having said this she simultaneously acknowledges that some people will be racist (lines 9-11). So in Q's account what we find is a denial of personal experience of racism. Simultaneously there is an acknowledgement that there are some situations where there can be racism. Further Q also acknowledges its existence for particular people.

A similar way of re-characterising discrimination was noticed in extract (5) also. In extract (5) Y responds to the interviewer's question by specifying that she has not faced discrimination. However the interviewer expresses surprise at her statement because the interviewer was expecting an affirmative answer. The basis for which as we have mentioned at different points being, the understanding that ethnic minority members should face discrimination. Y responds to the interviewer's surprise in the following way.

Extract 5

**Indian.H.S.S. S1**

- 1 I So did you put up with a lot of discrimination from work .. when you were  
2 sort of?  
3 Y Not really, no, not really.  
4 I In any of your jobs?

5 Y No. I think it was more shock. You know when you walk in the door, it's  
 6 bizarre. When you walk into a new job, it's more shock, see people's faces,  
 7 think you know  
 8 I mm  
 9 Y but after that, I think, because a, again I can talk for anybody, I can talk for  
 10 Scotland. So again you know I start talking, and everything is fine.  
 11 I mm  
 12 Y People get to know you quicker, and I think that's important.  
 13 I mm  
 14 Y But I know people that have a lot of discrimination, and I think it's easier for  
 15 a woman in that respect  
 16 I than for a man  
 17 Y than for a man, definitely. I think it's much easier  
 18 from a ethnic community, from an ethnic minority community I think so.  
 19 I'm sure some people will disagree. But certainly for me it has been  
 20 I easier  
 21 Y easier, I think, than say, just people I've known say my brother or my cousins,  
 22 you know.  
 23 I mm mm  
 24 Y I think it's a lot easier for a woman  
 25 I mm  
 26 Y ahm, than for a male sometimes.  
 27 I okay

Y responds by affirming that there is some reaction from those she interacts with at work. However she characterises the reaction not as discrimination but as 'shock'. She provides a vivid description of how people react to her to support her case that it is 'shock'. Having labelled others' reaction in this way she then goes further to provide two warrants for why she has not faced discrimination. First, she says that she has good interpersonal skills. In lines 9-10 she says that she talks and gets to know people quickly. Second, she says that lack of discrimination is a consequence of her gender. The authenticity of what she has said is supported by saying that she has first hand knowledge. She gives examples of her brothers and cousins to support her argument that men face more discrimination. She acknowledges that others could have a different opinion but states explicitly that this is her experience. Moreover by saying that discrimination is a reality for others she acknowledges the existence of discrimination for particular people. In line 14 she says that she knows others who have a 'lot of discrimination'. Her mention of

discrimination for her cousins and brothers also acknowledges the existence of discrimination. So like the earlier respondents what the speaker does is to deny personal experiences of discrimination. Moreover Y's going further to provide further warrants for not facing discrimination suggests that she does not view her terming others reaction as shock as sufficient to support her case of 'no discrimination'.

### **Providing other bases for discrimination**

The next two extracts are also denials of racial discrimination.

Extract 6

**Indian.H.S.M.WS1**

- 1 **I** ...about discrimination and what that means and whether at work you have  
2 faced any discrimination in a work situation  
3 (.)  
4 **M** I think I have  
5 **N** you mean as colour-wise or  
6 **I** any, any discrimination  
7 **N** I think men get paid more than women in my job.  
8 **I** mm  
9 **N** I'm sure they do  
10 **R** even though the same work you do  
11 **N** same work we do. I mean I am a pharmacist and you know what I do a man  
12 does, manager of the shop he's a manager of the shop but I'm sure they get  
13 paid more than  
14 **I** differently?  
15 **N** Because you know, I don't know, I don't know what the reason is. I'll need to  
16 go and find out.  
17 **O** It's a national thing. You find that is the statistics.  
18 **N** I don't find that I get paid less than a white woman. I find that I get paid the  
19 same.  
20 **O** Sexist.  
21 **N** Yah, more sexist rather than cultural.  
22 **P** or colour.  
23 **N** or colour or whatever.

In extract (6) unlike the participants in the earlier extracts participant N does not immediately deny experiences of discrimination. Instead she seeks a clarification about what type of discrimination the interviewer is talking about. In line 5 she asks

'you mean colour-wise or'. Mentioning colour suggests that the participant recognises the significance of racial discrimination as an appropriate answer to the interviewer's question. Wooffitt (1992) says that naming a state of affairs implies that the individual has knowledge about it. Moreover it suggests that the individual has some commitment to the existence of the object in principle and therefore it can be assumed that the participant is interested in the state of affairs mentioned. When the interviewer affirms that it could be any discrimination the participant goes on to talk of gender discrimination. What is interesting is that having named racial discrimination the expectation is that the participant would talk about it instead of something else. We understand the purpose of this as we consider what the participant says further.

In lines 7-21 we have an account of gender discrimination. The participant talks of getting paid less than a man. She raises a puzzle in line 15-16 that she does not know the reason for this. It is common knowledge that pay differentials exist for women and men. So obviously the participant is not looking for an answer to her question. The purpose of posing the puzzle is more an invitation for others in the group to also participate in her construction of gender discrimination. She is possibly inviting some consensus on the issue. Following the conversation we observe that this is how her puzzle is treated. One of the other participants O provides information that pay differences for men and women exist and that this is warranted through national statistics. Using this answer the participants jointly construct an account of gender discrimination.

Having constructed her account of gender discrimination as a valid form of discrimination for women N then proceeds to summarise that this is the kind of discrimination that she faces and not racial discrimination. It is interesting how she does this. Having done the joint construction of gender discrimination N says that she does not get paid less than a white woman. By naming white women what is

implied is that race is not the issue. She further explicitly states that she and white women get paid the same. O at this point joins the conversation and names the discrimination N faces as sexism. N then uses this to say that what she faces is sexism and not racial discrimination. In this way discounting race as an issue becomes a joint venture. The jointly produced account also explains non-compliance of the participant to elaborating on racial discrimination which she had earlier acknowledged as significant through her clarification turn. The participants considering race discrimination as an issue which needs to be accounted for suggests that although N negates it as a personal experience it exists for others.

Similarly in the next extract the respondent says that the basis of her difficulties is because she is of a small stature and not racial discrimination.

#### Extract 7

##### **Indian H.S.S.WS1**

- 1 **I** So, I mean, just holding on to that point about being a woman, have you ever  
2 faced any kind of difficulties with your work with regard to being a woman  
3 or with regard to being Asian or  
4 **R** I, I don't know whether it's to do with being a woman, whether it's to  
5 do with being Asian, or whether it's to do with being small ((I: slight  
6 laughter)), because if you can try to imagine a situation ((I: slight laughter))  
7 here, I am a consulting landscape architect going on site, they are all men,  
8 they are all labourers  
9 **I** mm  
10 **R** even the construction guys are like builders, and along walks this little girl  
11 ((laughter)) (( )) I can't get it into my head and  
12 so it swivels round  
13 **I** mm  
14 **R** and the first time I go on site with a new set of contractors  
15 **I** mmm  
16 **R** the first time, I now know that it's very important how that first time goes  
17 **I** mm  
18 **R** because what you have to do in that few minutes, I don't think people mean to  
19 be racist or sexist or sexist but I think it's what their expectation is, that  
20 somebody who wields authority on them is at least of a certain height, if not  
21 male, you know. I must admit I've never felt racial discrimination ever in my  
22 life, not even at school or ever.  
23 **I** m hm  
24 **R** never felt it. Ahm, in that few minutes I have learnt how to cope with it. I've  
25 learnt how to go, how to look people straight in the eyes, shake their hand,



26 make my voice very authoritative, and quick decisions.  
 27 I mm  
 28 R You have to make quicker decisions than men, because if you don't, they  
 29 think you don't know what you are doing. You have to be careful, because  
 30 obviously you can't make very quick decisions you are going to regret.  
 31 I mm  
 32 R So .. I normally will meet the contractor first, and I will arrange the  
 33 contractor to be on site when I go.  
 34 I mm  
 35 R And if you have the respect of the contractor, the men will respect you  
 36 anyway.  
 37 I mmm  
 38 R And that's how I work it now. And it's fine, work is going well. I don't find  
 39 any problems with that.  
 40 I mm. But obviously you found your own way of  
 41 R of dealing with it  
 42 I dealing with it. (slight laughter)  
 43 R The thing is, I think that people, I think it's people's perception of who they  
 44 can take authority from.  
 45 I mm  
 46 R I do think, I know it sounds trivial but I think size has a lot to do with it.

R responding to the interviewer's question of whether she has faced race or gender discrimination begins by posing her lack of clarity as to what type of discrimination she actually faces. She mentions that she doesn't know whether the discrimination she faces is on the basis of the two things the interviewer has specified, namely race and gender or stature a third category which R has introduced. Having introduced this third category she then proceeds to offer an account which confirms that the basis of her difficulties at work is to do with having a 'small stature' and possibly gender.

R in her account first specifies her role in relation to the workers. She says that she is a 'consultant landscape architect' (line 7). Her specifying her role has the function of introducing into the conversation the kinds of category entitlements which go with that role, namely someone in authority and with particular skills. She then adds that there are certain gender expectations which go with someone with authority, namely that the person would be male. She also suggests that they could even expect someone of a particular height. In lines 20-21 she explicitly states that

there is the expectation from the labourers that someone in an authoritative position should be of a good height if not male.

Having portrayed what kind of physical characteristics are expected of a consulting landscape architect, she then goes on to produce a contrast between her stature and that of the workers on the site. She specifies that they are male, labourers and that they are like builders. Mentioning the categories enables the listener to build up a particular image of the workers, namely that they are big built, working class men. In contrast her stature is portrayed as small or tiny. In line 10 she talks of herself as a 'little girl'. She makes fun of the way the headgear does not fit her. Her humorous construction downplays the implications of discussing her smallness but at the same time affirms that these are her physical characteristics. What the contrast brings out is that R is very much unlike the worker's expectation of the consultant landscape architect. The further implication of this lack of fit between the workers' expectation and her physical characteristics is that the difficulties she faces at work is a consequence of her size and gender. This has the consequence of discounting race as a basis of her difficulties. In fact in lines 21 –22 R explicitly states that she has not faced racial discrimination. Moreover when specifying that she has not faced racial discrimination, R uses the extreme formulation 'never' to make her claim of 'no discrimination' stand. She also mentions that she has not even faced it in school. It is common knowledge that racism is prevalent in schools. So claiming not to have experienced racial discrimination in a setting where it is likely that she would have, supports her argument that she has not faced racial discrimination at all. So R's construction of the basis of her difficulties as her size and gender and also her explicit denial of facing racial discrimination ever in her life together make a strong case of R not facing racial discrimination at work. As the conversation proceeds R strengthens her case that discrimination is due to size by talking about the ways of dealing with it.

The main points in the extracts analysed so far are summarised as follows: All the participants claim that they have not experienced discrimination. However all the participants then treated what they had claimed, namely not facing discrimination as an accountable matter. From our analyses we observed that participants gave a variety of reasons for not facing racial discrimination. In extracts (1) to (4) the respondents drew on the specifics of their work to account for lack of discrimination. There were those like in extracts (4) and (5) who re-characterised the reaction of others as 'ignorance' or 'shock' rather than discrimination. Others like in extracts (6) and (7) accounted for the basis of their difficulties at work as gender or stature thereby discounting race discrimination as a significant factor. One participant drew on her occupational identity to justify not facing discrimination. In a number of the accounts when the respondents denied racial discrimination they made it clear that the claim was made on the basis of personal experience. What they also mentioned is that experiences of discrimination were relevant for others or in other work situations. So what the participants were doing was not to discount experiences of discrimination per se. The implications of the participants warranting for not having had personal experiences of discrimination will be discussed further in the concluding section of this chapter.

## **TRIVIALISING EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION**

In the following extracts the participants talked of some experience of discrimination. However when they described their experiences they argued that it was subtle and expressed some uncertainty as to whether it did constitute discrimination. Sometimes they argued that everyone discriminated and on that basis undermined its significance to minorities.

### **Patronising comments**

In the following extracts the participants say that they have not faced direct

discrimination.

Extract 8

**Indian H.S.M.WS1**

- 1 **D** I haven't faced any internal discrimination, direct discrimination, but indirect  
2 I think there is discrimination in  
3 **M** ya there is  
4 **D** In my work I sense this. I work with mostly I mean with social work with the  
5 ahm the indigenous population, and I work with the elderly who really, we  
6 are a new phenomenon to them especially in Scotland. We are not so in  
7 England, where we've been there for longer. People have got used to us in the  
8 bigger community, right. And I've come here and people will say, "oh this is  
9 little Miss India or make comments like that.  
10 **I** mm  
11 **D** So that is around and you feel the sense

Extract 9

**African H.S.M.W.S2**

- 1 **A** I've, I don't know, with nursing it is never a big problem, would there, there'd  
2 be the odd patient with their very superior patronising used to think I lived in  
3 rooms and perhaps I would like to come coffee, for the little black girl, and it  
4 was always that

In extract (8) the participant having denied facing direct discrimination proceeds to suggest that it does exist in some form. The participant states explicitly that she has not experienced direct discrimination but indirect discrimination (lines 1-2). She then proceeds to describe this alternate form of discrimination in very specific ways. She begins by specifying that what she faces is mainly comments. She then provides an example of how her clients call her 'little Miss India'. Stating that they categorise her in terms of her ethnic identity and the kind of patronising tone implied by the use of the words 'little Miss' work to build her argument that this is a form of discrimination. The term 'little Miss' is usually reserved for little girls and hence its use for a working women is to be viewed as patronising. In extract (9) also we find a similar kind of descriptive device. The participant states how her patients call her as the 'little black girl'. In extract (9) the participant explicitly labels the attitude

expressed towards her as patronising.

However portraying discrimination faced as just these patronising comments has a further consequence. It minimises the seriousness of discrimination faced. That this type of discrimination is to be considered as not very serious and has to be excused can also be argued from different things that both participants say. In extract (8) the participant provides an earlier account describing her job. The participant says that she works with the elderly. Moreover she specifies the geographical location as Scotland and points out that the minorities have been there only for a short period. In line 6 she says 'we are a new phenomenon' in Scotland. She then draws a contrast with England where the minorities have lived longer and also have a bigger population. The contrast suggests that the problem she faces at work is a consequence of the minorities staying in Scotland for a very short time. However portraying ignorance as the cause of their behaviour suggests that it should not be taken seriously. So while maintaining that the comments do contribute to some form of discrimination what her account of describing the indirect discrimination and her account of the nature of her work does is to mitigate its significance. Minimising the significance of discrimination in this way was also seen in extract (9). Here the participant states that discrimination is not a 'big problem' in nursing and also points out that it is only an occasional thing. A says that it is only the 'odd patient' who has a superior attitude (line 2). The word 'odd' indicates that this is only occasional. That its effect is minimal is reinforced by her summarising statement 'it was always that' (line 4). So in this way both the participants describe the existence of a subtle form of discrimination but simultaneously work to minimise its significance.

### **Uncertainty as to whether the experience constitutes discrimination**

In the following extracts the participants while stating that discrimination exists in



some form say that they are unsure of specifically stating what exactly it is.

Extract 10

**African H.S.S1**

- 1 **I** In your work itself have you felt that a, a, you faced any discrimination?  
2 **F** I wouldn't say direct discrimination.  
3 **I** mm  
4 **F** Maybe people because, you never know what people are thinking, you know,  
5 until they spell it out.  
6 **I** mm  
7 **F** So I might have encountered the odd one or two, who would have maybe, not  
8 have directly told me or whatever, because (( )) but  
9 have acted in a way or manner that have been different. But I always put it  
10 down to experience in life

Extract 11

**Chinese. L.S.M.W.S1**

- 1 **I** I mean if you have started working with other agencies or whatever then after  
2 you started working do find any difficulties or discrimination or racism  
3 there in the work itself I was wondering like when you were waitressing or  
4 things like that  
(( a few lines where the participant talks about improving her English))  
5 **I** what I was asking is when you worked as a waitress was it only in the  
6 Chinese restaurant or did you work in other restaurants  
7 **R** Chinese restaurant  
8 **I** only there  
9 **S** I think you do come across some many cases customers  
10 **I** customers thats what I was going to ask you  
11 **S** different from ((overtalking in Chinese)) you do come across racism in  
12 customer just because I can't say definitely in our case just because you are  
13 Chinese they say something not very polite or they try to say something to  
14 make you  
15 **I** so it is difficult I mean do you have any experience more than just the  
16 comments or  
17 **S** in our case not very bad but some other Chinese shop this is just this is  
18 heresay ahm some customer say things not very good or some physical abuse  
19 **I** violence  
20 **S** violence yes because not their nationality so they do treat us differently  
21 **I** so you feel it is there for everybody whatever job that is  
22 **S** yes it also depends there's lots of nice people around

Extract 12

**Indian.H.S.S.S1**

- 1 **T** I just say that the prejudice where I work is there, there's never, they would

2        never be as rude to say it openly, but it's  
 3 **S**    It's there  
 4 **T**    It's just the way they think, they would never put me on, in charge of big,  
 5        their largest clients because I am not the face they would want to represent to  
 6        their multinational clients. In London it's different, they would, it's ability  
 7        rather than who

In extract (10) the participant denies experience of direct discrimination. In the other two extracts the participants admit to experiencing discrimination. They all then proceed to state their uncertainty about pointing to a particular experience as the discrimination because it is not stated in an overt manner. Thus in extract (10) the participant says that 'she never know(s) what people are thinking'(line 4). She further adds that others have not 'directly told her (me) (line 8). In extract (11) the participant says 'I can't say definitely in our case' (line 12). In extract (12) the participant says that 'they would never be as rude to say it openly' (lines 1-2). All the participants statements suggest that the discrimination is in a covert form. It is more about what the individuals feel rather than experience directly as racism.

Having stated their uncertainty the participants then proceed to describe their experience in some way. What they do is to portray that they are treated differently because of their minority status. Thus in extract (10) the participant talks of how people have 'acted in a manner that have been different' (line 9). In extract (11) the respondent says that individuals say things which are not polite just because they are Chinese. In extract (12) the participant provides an account of how her employers will not give her particular job assignments because she is from a minority community. She argues that her employers will not allow an ethnic minority to represent their multinational clients. What is implicit in all these statements is that others are not treated in the way that they are treated. So what the comparison accomplishes is to establish the relevant basis for their differential experience as ethnicity and discount any other reason which could be provided.

The participants although they work to describe their experience as a subtle

form of discrimination simultaneously downplay the seriousness of the discrimination faced. Thus in extract (10) the participant says that her experience is only occasional. She says that it is the 'odd' client who behaves in this way. In extract (12) the participant talks of the experiences of discrimination as 'not very bad'. She contrasts with others experience to portray that her experience is not bad. She says that in other shops people experience physical abuse. Her own experience as we have already mentioned is only comments. Moreover in all the extracts the uncertainty which the participants exhibit in labelling the experience as discrimination is also a way of downplaying the seriousness of the experience.

### **It happens everywhere**

In the next two extracts the participants downplay the seriousness of discrimination in yet another way.

Extract 13

**Indian.H.S.M.WS1**

- 1 **A** ....even at work I think you face. It's not that black people do not discriminate
- 2 among themselves, but I think they do you know people from one part of the
- 3 world discriminate people from other parts of the world and even if you are
- 4 from the same part of the world some people, not everybody, some people,
- 5 will discriminate. So it's just, its like I don't know, I suppose, in time I don't
- 6 think it's more right anymore. I just accept it happens, and get on with it.
- 7 Sometimes you win, sometimes you don't.

Extract 14

**Indian.L.S. M.W. S1**

- 1 **R1** institutional racism, what about when you get racism from your own people?
- 2 **R2** From our own people?
- 3 **R1** We get lot of racism
- 4 **R3** Oh yeah, you get more from your own people than *Goriah* <sup>1</sup>
- ((laughter))
- 5 than *goriah*
- 6 **R2** I haven't worked sort of like that everywhere. I've been just myself. I have no
- 7 contact with our people working together.
- 8 **R1** You do get racism when you get your people as well.
- 9 **R3** I think in our case you don't call it direct racism, is like a personality clashes
- 10 type of thing, and that converts into the racism and things like that.
- 11 **R1** You do have racism if you work in the mixed community: if you are Pakistani

12 and Indian there is racism.  
 13 **R3** That's what I say, but it's more like a personal clashes thing.  
 14 **R1** No, it's not a personal clashes thing straightforward  
 15 **R2** again like that  
 16 **R1** You can feel it racism within ourselves as well. If you are from a Sikh  
 17 community or you are from a Pakistani community or if you serve different  
 18 community then there is a racism but if you even if you are depends on which  
 19 class you are from, Brahmin or other casteism. Otherwise then if you are  
 20 saying sort of level then it's a personality clash I would say, but if you are not  
 21 of the same caste then there is a racism, definite racism. And if you are not  
 22 same community, religion, then there is a definite racism; break oh yeah  
 23 because I work with the different people and groups and minority ethnic  
 24 communities - India, Pakistan, Bangladesh you can see there racism. They  
 25 **I** I think it's kind of prejudices or inability to accept difference, it is true.  
 26 **R3** it is there  
 27 **I** prejudices  
 28 **R1** We all have I have as well to be honest because I don't like my secretary  
 29 make cup of tea for me because she won't wash the cup. That's a prejudice  
 30 not from you because I want to see how much milk from white secretary I'll  
 31 make my tea myself because she won't wash the cup they wash it and they  
 32 wipe it with the cloth and I won't drink tea in that and I know they have  
 33 done that  
 34 **R2** properly like we do if we do it ourselves.  
 35 **R1** But this is a prejudice, this is a prejudice. This is a prejudice I agree and I  
 36 know that.  
 37 **R3** It's not just they do, we do it as well.  
 38 **R1** That's what I'm saying we all do; do I agree with that, and I know that that's  
 39 wrong. But I just can't help it. I will not make her tea it will make me sick  
 40 **I** You can't drink it?  
 41 **R1** My children say, 'you are prejudiced'. But I do I am to be honest, we all are at  
 42 some extent

In the following extracts the participants specify that their own communities also exhibit racism. In extract (13) the participant after stating that racism is there between black people then goes on to broaden and state that everyone discriminates. In lines 2-4 A argues that people from all over the world discriminate against each other. So from being specific she becomes much more ambiguous about the identity of the people who discriminate. By stating that discrimination is something which happens everywhere the significance of discrimination for black people is downplayed. However others contradicting that not everyone is racist or discriminatory could undermine the broad view that she has expressed. A further



consequence of her account could also be that A is condoning discrimination. A's account is modified to address both these issues. She explicitly mentions that not everyone is discriminatory. She says that it is characteristic of some people. She also states that she does not say that discrimination is right. She produces a final upshot, which portrays her as being pragmatic about discrimination. She says in lines 6 and 7 that she accepts this as a normal part of living. Her pragmatic approach while minimising any potential implications of her earlier accounting also reinforces the view that it should not be taken too seriously. Further her acceptance is justified because she has already stated her view that it is not right to discriminate.

In extract (14) similarly the participants acknowledge the existence of discrimination among their own community (line 1-3, 8, 11-12, 16-18). This is contrasted with the racism they get from white people. The acknowledgement of racism within minority communities and the contrast both work to suggest that racism is not just a feature of the white community. Others also exhibit it. So like in the earlier extract by talking of racism as present 'everywhere' the participants downplay the significance of racism for ethnic minority.

However this type of downplaying has certain consequences. Claiming racism to be a feature of ethnic minorities could be treated as problematic. One of the participants does find it problematic because she then begins to debate on the issue. R3 one of the respondents argues that if discrimination is between ethnic minority communities it should be treated as 'personality clashes' (lines 9-13) and not direct racism. R1 who initially said that racism exists within ethnic minority communities supports her differing viewpoint in a number of ways. She provides examples to draw distinctions between what can and cannot be treated as personality clashes. She draws on caste to suggest that if people belong to different castes then it becomes racism. According to her discrimination can be labelled as personality clashes only if the individuals are equal in all respects (line 20). Everything else,



such as discrimination between individuals belonging to different religion, community, is racism for her. She also further supports her argument that ethnic minorities are racist by providing a mundane example of how she does not drink tea made by her secretary. Having stated that she is herself prejudiced she goes on to restate that everyone is prejudiced. Providing the ordinary example has the function of enabling her listeners to identify with her. We observe that this is what happens because the participant who opposed R1 in the first instance agrees with her (line 37). So in this way R1 manages to maintain her viewpoint that everyone exhibits discrimination. At the same time R1 does admit that it is not a correct thing to do by providing an account of her children's reaction to her behaviour. In lines 40-41 she states that her children say that she is prejudiced.

Thus in extracts (13) and (14) the participants downplay the significance of discrimination by treating it as a feature of all communities and people. They simultaneously ensure that the listeners do not consider their view as condoning discrimination.

### **ESTABLISHING THE ORDINARY AND ROUTINE AS DISCRIMINATION**

In the following extracts the participants state that they have experienced discrimination. However they are oriented to the fact that experiences they have described as discrimination could be viewed as illegitimate by their listeners. The participants address this in their accounting.

Extract 15

**Pakistani H.S.S1**

- 1 **I** The final part is, have you ever faced discrimination at work?  
2 **R** Yah  
3 **I** You have  
4 **R** Yah. You want detail or  
5 **I** Do you want to say something about it?  
6 **R** I don't mind saying something. Ahm, I mean I faced discrimination in most  
7 aspects of my life as a woman, and as a black person, ahm, ahm, but it really  
8 came together in a job I had a few years ago, when I worked for a large

9 organisation, ahm, which was very impersonal. So most of the time, I mean  
 10 the jobs I have done have been in small firms, then with organisations where  
 11 the culture does tend to be more caring, you know because you are a  
 12 small organisation. But this was in a large, ahm, statutory body, and  
 13 and the policy in this place was, if you had three or more, short-term  
 14 absences, which was self-certificated then you had to pulled in and  
 15 interviewed by the Supervisor. Now, you know, what happened was,  
 16 somebody else was pulled in for an interview by the Supervisor, but  
 17 because I happened to be the only other black person in the organisation my  
 18 records were also checked up and I was pulled in for an interview  
 19 **I** It is horrible  
 20 **R** Isn't it? absolutely  
 21 **I** because you were the, just the only other black person  
 22 **R** absolutely, absolutely. That came clear  
 23 **I** as you went on  
 24 **R** as it went on, progressed, because, I mean, it's one of those things where you  
 25 weren't actually talking about why you have been asking me with this guy,  
 26 and so I went along to meet with him. And it was a, I need to sit and talk to  
 27 you, sit there, I noticed looking at your records that a, you had lot of short-  
 28 term absences. And nothing actually happened. This other person had come  
 29 to me and told me that this had happened to him, so when I was in the  
 30 corridor, I was a bit aware of it. Now I just confided, well yah, and then it  
 31 was this case of, well can you tell me whether you find it stressful working  
 32 here, ahm, bla, bla, bla, but it was all done in a very unsupportive way, wasn't  
 33 in a way like look now how hard it must be for you to be one of only two  
 34 black workers in this large organisation, although we may try anti-  
 35 discriminatory work in practice, you know, and ahm, in one of those hideous  
 36 hideous long interviews, then I walked out thinking, no it really wasn't on.  
 37 So I went in, I told the rest of my team what happened and I approached the  
 38 union, and we wrote a memo to this guy, and then I went into to see  
 39 him with my union rep. to challenge him on it. And it really was quite  
 40 amazing. So much time he had spent speaking to me. He hadn't  
 41 written a single word down, but these notes appeared from somewhere,  
 42 you know ((I: laughter)).  
 43 And, ahm, and there were all sorts of issues there  
 ((a few lines omitted where she talks of her the legitimacy of her illness))  
 44 But now it became all this hideous, hideous incident which got,  
 45 which he blew out of proportion and then accusations and counter-  
 46 accusations were hurled and stuff like that. They all culminated  
 47 in this horrendous meeting with him and some of his staff and me and a sort  
 48 of person and our team, our colleagues.  
 (( a few lines omitted where she talks of the other staff member who was  
 questioned))  
 49 and I left the organisation completely, because I have no desire to work  
 50 promoting anti-discriminatory practice on behalf of an organisation that was  
 51 open to the courts, and basically it was a white organisation yah, yah. it was  
 52 X actually, it is confidential  
 53 **I** yah

54 **R** It was the X department. (I and S: laughter)  
 55 **I** and the details will be taken off the tape  
 56 **R** But, but that's it, and also I dealt with it, and I just left that as soon as I could,  
 57 really after that. So that's been the most drastic one, because it was personal  
 58 and the institutional coming together and it really is quite frightening when  
 59 you see what power the institution actually has against you, and how strong  
 60 an individual has to be to take on and challenge that ahm, and because that  
 61 did really affect my health, and my self-confidence and my self-  
 62 **I** yes  
 63 **R** and the other aspect of one's ahm personal assets or facets or one's person,  
 64 personality, and it's not something I would like to have to go for again but I  
 65 do feel if did happen again, I would be in a much better position to challenge  
 66 exactly, know something more about it, how to do it again

Extract 16

**African L.S.M.W.S1**

1 **I** mm. okay. Going on to the next thing. You have been here for a long time,  
 2 twenty-seven years, what is your experience of discrimination?  
 3 **S** I have personally been discriminated against once in the street that was really  
 4 terrible, because after all these, it was, maybe it was ten years back.  
 5 A woman walked at me and said, "You people should go home,  
 6 should go back home where you belong." So that was my first  
 7 impression, experience of discrimination, actually cut a knife  
 8 way through me, you know because Edinburgh is a cosmopolitan  
 9 place, you don't really expect this, but a so that I cried actually,  
 10 but she just said those few words. It's very hard, you know.  
 11 **I** Yes.  
 12 **S** That a  
 13 **I** It was upsetting.  
 14 **S** It was upsetting to think that after all these years, I've been here  
 15 **I** It still can happen.  
 16 **S** It still can happen, but a, it has happened, in Edinburgh it is  
 17 still there, I mean, you know these night jobs I am doing, I really  
 18 had to fight for it, so  
 19 **I** because of, to get in  
 20 **S** I think so, I mean, to get in, I mean. I went in, the reason you fill in the forms  
 21 or expect people to read through your forms and if there is anything that they  
 22 think, would hinder you from getting the job, really shouldn't be called you  
 23 know then I was called in, I went through the mandatory training you know  
 24 and then on the last day I was told, no, you won't come in, and then I thought,  
 25 why I know she told me why then I thought that was unfair, after  
 26 **I** What did she say?  
 27 **S** Because I have a back problem, from a long time with it. I was told, no, I  
 28 won't come in because, or I won't be accepted because of that. And then I  
 29 thought, but I hadn't left out any information I had filled in a medical form.  
 30 And I told, I have told them, so why wait till of the training?  
 31 **I** Yes, exactly

32 S So I was kind of fuming. So I got home and I, she had told me, they both  
 33 would definitely write a letter and say that I won't be accepted. Which was  
 34 true, the letter came, you know, and I thought, phoo, this is the man I want to  
 35 see, whoever has signed the letter ((D & I: laughter))  
 36 I So you went and had a word with them.  
 ((a few lines omitted where she talks of the difficulties she faced in getting  
 an interview with the person-in-charge))  
 37 S So I said to him, I had been pressurised to come in, I filled in the form, I  
 38 filled in the medical form. It should have been looked at, and then (.)  
 39 given me a rejection. Not to say, call me in, say that they will  
 40 interview me at the end of the course and turn me away.  
 41 That's not proper, that is improper. I said to  
 42 him, that was a waste of my time, that was improper. And I said to him,  
 43 look I don't have a university degree, but my past work record is  
 44 good. So ((softly)) the boss started straightening his head up.  
 45 ((D & I: laughter))  
 46 And to cut a long story short, he did, he did accept me,  
 47 and I was called in, and then I would be put again through  
 48 a three-quarter hour interview  
 49 I ah.  
 50 S And that time, by that time, I was, I didn't want to show them I was getting  
 51 annoyed with these prolonged interviews, because people will go there, they  
 52 would be just called in, and they have just spoken to other employees there,  
 53 again they will be asked certain questions, and then they will be given the job  
 54 they say, it's about maybe twenty minutes or something or so. By this time I  
 55 was getting annoyed, but didn't want to show them, so probably what I said  
 56 must have made them think, must have made them know what I felt, so I  
 57 said, "Look, why don't you accept, why don't you give me the job, if you  
 58 think, I won't do it properly, if you see that I don't do it properly, you just  
 59 dismiss me." So they said, "We don't put on people to employment to dismiss  
 60 them, no, no, no." So anyway, I got the job.

Participants in both the extracts first describe the experience they label as discrimination. However the participants' description suggests that their experience is legitimate. In extract (15) the participant says that she was called in to account for a number of absences at work which were self-certified. However she also mentions that this was in keeping with the work policy according to which any staff was pulled up if there were three or more absences. In extract (16) the participant says that she was rejected from being taken on as a night nurse on medical grounds.

The participants then go on to argue that these experiences are illegitimate. They say a number of things which suggests that this is the case. In extract (15) the



participant argues that she was asked to account for her absences not as a matter of routine procedure but because she was targeted. She provides an account to support her claim. She says that she was asked to account for her absences because another person who was black was called in to account for absences. She does not explicitly state that the other person was black but her statement that she was called in because 'she was the only other black person' (line 17) implies this. What her account also suggests is that the authorities have made an assumption that just because one black person had a problem all other blacks would have the same problem. The implication therefore is that an ordinary work policy was manipulated by those in authority making it illegitimate. Moreover her statement in line 18 that her 'records were checked up' also suggests that this was something devious. The participant also describes the unsupportive nature of the interview to provide further grounds for it being illegitimate. In lines 35-36 and 47 she uses the words 'hideous' and 'horrendous' to describe the two interviews she had with her supervisor. It portrays the supervisor's actions as a deliberate attempt to undermine her. However her supervisor can still be viewed as just doing a job. Moreover it can also be argued that it is just her personal view about the affair and so it can be discounted as being biased. The participant orients to this. She therefore points out that she has the support of the union regarding this issue. She says in line 38 that the union wrote a memo to this person. She also argues that she had the support of her entire team. In lines 47-48 she points out how she and her colleagues had a meeting with the supervisor and his staff. So in this way from being a individual issue the issue becomes a group issue. The consequence of this is that she makes it clear that others also considered what was happening as illegitimate. She also casts doubts about the integrity of the supervisor to support her construction that the procedure was not straightforward. She points out that the supervisor wrote up issues which had not even been discussed in the first meeting with her (lines 40-41). So in this elaborate



way what was routine and ordinary was constructed as illegitimate.

In extract (16) also similarly the participant argues that being told she was not fit to do her work on medical grounds was illegitimate. Her complaint is formulated on the grounds that even before she went for the training she had filled in a medical form (lines 20-25). So according to her if she had to be rejected then it should have been done right at the beginning. Her complaint raises the issue that there was something devious about her rejection and not just what appeared to be the case. So in this way she too constructs her experience as illegitimate. Further grounds that her experience is discrimination is formulated in the way she was treated differently from others when she was finally called in to be interviewed for the job. She provides a contrast of the amount of time taken for her interview and others' interview. She says that others were only interviewed for twenty minutes (lines 52-54) in contrast to her being kept in for three-quarters of an hour (lines 47-48). That others are treated very lightly is portrayed in her stating that others 'just go in and come out'.

Both the participants' portrayal of the ordinary, mundane and routine procedures as illegitimate enables them to construct their experience as discrimination. What we also find is that the participants have to produce some elaborate accounting to actually establish something which is legitimate as illegitimate. The problem arises because the experience is something which is ordinary and mundane. Participants do not have this difficulty when they talk about overt racism, and something which is immediately identified as racism.

In the first part of extract (15) the participant provides an account of overt racism. She does not have to establish its legitimacy. She just describes the discrimination she experienced and then goes on to state the consequences. There are some interesting features of this account. The participant says that her experience of discrimination is something which happened sometime ago, namely ten years.

This resonates with the claims made within academic literature that incidents of overt discrimination have reduced over the past few years. Finally both participants are portrayed as overcoming the difficult situation. In extract (15) the participant challenges the situation and then finally leaves the organisation but through her own choice. In extract (16) the participant manages to get her night job. In the following extracts the participants do not do anything at all about the discrimination they face.

## **AVOIDING BEING A VICTIM**

In the following extracts the participants say that they have experienced discrimination.

Extract 17

**African.L.S.M.WS1**

- 1 **I** So you feel there is a lot of discrimination in work.  
2 **P** Oh, sure, sure, definitely.  
3 **I** Have you ever tried taking it up with any organisation or (...)  
4 **P** No, no, I don't  
5 **I** You don't.  
6 **P** No. As I say that, I don't want to frustrate myself.  
7 **I** mm (.)  
8 **P** Yes, so I stay where I am.  
9 **I** But you might, if you take it up with the racial equality or some council at  
10 some point. You might get some support and (...)  
11 **P** I am not too sure, ya. I am not too sure about this.  
12 **I** mm.  
13 **P** Because it is going to take a lot of my time  
14 **I** Yes, it takes a lot of energy  
15 **P** which, ya, I don't want to go through, all those things, ya,  
16 **I** so you just  
17 **P** So it would rather break my nerve than, what, all those things I am going  
18 those I am going through, I am only,  
19 **I** mm.  
20 **P** ya. Because as soon as they know that you are doing something, they make,  
21 they, they make everything worse for you, ya. When they know that you are  
22 taking action,  
23 **I** yes  
24 **P** so they make your life miserable.  
25 **I** mm.  
26 **P** yes.

- 27 **I** So what would do? Just their attitude  
 28 **P** Their attitude, yes, attitude.  
 29 **I** Would they be rude to you?  
 30 **P** Oh yes. They would be worse than what is going on at the moment.  
 31 **I** Yes  
 32 **P** Yes, so that's why I don't want to go through all that.

Extract 18

**African.H.S.M.WS1**

- 1 **A** I sort of I sort of worry a bit about whether I'm I sometimes wonder why is it  
 2 that I'm so badly ahm exploited and I sometimes think that I if I was white  
 3 they wouldn't dare and I don't know how to bring it up to them if I took you  
 4 to equal opps I said the person who used to do this job before she  
 5 had a higher level she was promoted and I wasn't promoted and is  
 6 it because of my colour and I don't know how to do it I don't want  
 7 to bring it up because I don't like the idea of going through all that  
 8 painful grievance procedure so I'm trying to find ways of of being  
 9 assertive without having to fight a battle which will cost  
 10 me a lot in emotional energy I'd rather walk away from it. I'm getting to the  
 11 stage where I walk away from too much in my life than stand up and fight for  
 12 whats right

In extract (17) the participant explicitly states that she has experienced racism. However in extract (18) the participant does not immediately state that she has experienced racism. In extract (18) the participant raises a question about the state of affairs. She says that she does not know why she was badly exploited (line 2). Raising such a question usually has the consequence of the listener suggesting a possible cause or the participants themselves going on to provide an answer. We have seen such instances in earlier extracts. However both these do not happen here. The participant then provides an example of how she was treated differently from her white colleague (lines 4-5) Again she raises another question as to whether the other person received preferential treatment because she was white (line 6). Once again neither the interviewer nor she answer the question. However by raising the question the participant has clearly pointed out that one of the possible explanations for her experience is race.

Having established that there is experience of discrimination, both the

participants then say that they do not do anything about it. In extract (17) the participant says 'no, no, I don't want to frustrate myself' (line 6). In extract (18) the participant says 'I don't want to bring it up' (lines 6-7). Both provide similar reasons for their 'non-action'. They argue that they have weighed the personal costs and decided that it was not worth challenging it. Justifying their 'non-action' by portraying high personal costs puts the problem on the system. This avoids them being seen as victims. It prevents them from being viewed as passively taking all that was meted out to them. Moreover non-action is also portrayed as their choice or preference. It is not thrust upon them.

Having now analysed a number of extracts we proceed to draw together some of our main analytical findings.

### **DENIALS AND TRIVIALISING DISCRIMINATION - AN ACCOUNTABLE MATTER.**

From our analysis we observed that a number of participants denied personal experiences of discrimination. Others trivialised experiences of discrimination through a number of strategies, such as treating others reaction to them as just patronising comments, raising uncertainty about whether experiences counted as discrimination and discounting them as just occasional occurrences. They also excused others' behaviour by saying that they were ignorant or that everyone discriminated and thereby claimed that the behaviour was not unusual.

These denials and minimising strategies imply that discrimination is therefore not big issues for the participants. However there is so much of literature which we have pointed out in the beginning of the chapter which argue that discrimination is a feature of minorities. This is also true of the prevalent 'common sense' understanding. What we observe in the participants' accounts is that they are oriented to such an understanding. It is precisely because of this that the participants provide explanations as to why they did not face discrimination or why it was only

an occasional experience in their lives. Thus we find that participants pointed out that they personally did not face racial discrimination because of the features of their work (extracts 1-5), or that the basis of their difficulties was due to other reasons such as gender or stature and not due to race. Sometimes participants argued that they did not face discrimination because of their occupational identity. Similarly when they trivialised experiences of discrimination also the participants pointed out that it was not a feature of their work or that it was not a regular feature of their work. Moreover the participants' accounts portray that discrimination is only faced in specific work situations and by specific people. Their accounts do not deny discrimination *per se*.

Thus we observe that in many accounts participants do state that discrimination exists elsewhere or for other people. In that sense the political discourses of minorities facing discrimination is maintained in our participants' accounts. However accounting against personal experience of discrimination has the effect of moving away from the understanding that discrimination is an integral and pervasive part of being a minority. A further consequence of such accounting is that it overcomes the identity of 'being powerless' or 'being a victim' which is usually conferred on minorities. Media attention has predominantly focused on the problems that black people face, i.e discrimination. The positive aspects of their lives do not get much attention (Van Dijk , 1992). This in itself perpetuates and maintains the discourse of 'power' for the dominant community and that of 'powerless' for the black/ethnic minority community. Breaking it therefore as our analytical findings suggest is possibly the way by which minorities have started resisting this passive acknowledgement of status conferred on them. In a recent study of African British women, Milne *et. al.* (1998) argue that the participants in their study resist discrimination. They say that their participants were not content to passively take what was being handed out to them. In our analyses of extracts (17) and (18) we



observed that even when the participants did not resist discrimination but accepted the situation they said that it was their choice. They argued that they had weighed the costs and then decided non-action was the right decision to make. What our analyses is therefore pointing out is that at the level of talk participants are resisting the passive roles they are expected to take.

### **SUBTLE FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION**

An interesting feature of our analyses was the focus of our participants on subtle forms of discrimination. A number of our participants constructed experiences of discrimination in flexible ways such as patronising comments or that it was something they felt to be discrimination on the basis of perceived differential treatment. They also named experiences as discrimination by pointing out the illegitimate treatment of routine, ordinary procedures. What we find in our accounts resonates with statements made by other academics. Baron and Byrne (1997) argue that overt discrimination has reduced over the past few years in the United States and in a number of other societies. They add that this has been replaced by subtle forms of discrimination. They argue that these subtle forms are not as intense or as prevalent as in the past. They quote a study conducted by Martin and Parker (1995) describing the views of young Americans to support that there is a change in prejudiced attitudes. The young people in their study were portrayed as having the understanding that racial differences stem from social factors such as childhood opportunities and not from biological factors. Possibly educating society about these issues and the various proactive steps taken to counter racial discrimination have played a role in bringing about this change. Or it could be the simple reason that overt racism is much more recognisable and because it is also punishable that it is not resorted to.

However there is a difficulty with these subtle forms of discrimination. It is much harder to establish these as discrimination. In extracts (15) and (16) the

participants had to resort to the strategy of providing elaborate details to construct how ordinary, routine procedures could become discriminatory practices. Thus participants provided elaborate reasons to formulate how routine absences checks could become oppressive or that medical reasons could be brought up at inappropriate times and could be used against them. This suggests that subtle forms are also damaging and difficult situations to face. Moghissi (1994) in a personal case study of racism and sexism in academia discusses the difficulties of establishing subtle forms of racism as racism. She also discusses the personal costs that such subtle discrimination carries. As Moghissi (1994:223) says

It is usually harder to reveal the subtle, unconscious racism of intellectuals and the incredible tolerance of racism in academic institutions than to expose a man in the street who commits overt racism.

She further argues

This is particularly the case in those institutions and communities which present and preserve an idealised imagery of liberalism, openness and diversity, such as universities, for most liberal and left educators tend to understand racism only in terms of overt words and actions deriving from malicious intentions and fail to recognise that highly educated and otherwise gentle individuals can also be guilty of prejudicial perceptions and practices.

However subtle forms of discrimination do not carry the same amount of intensity as overt discrimination, as our participants accounts of trivialising discrimination suggest. Moreover the fact that overt discrimination has become less is some indication that measures to curb racism are working and this is possibly a step towards a future more tolerant society.

## **CONCLUSION**

We began this chapter with a discussion of how racial discrimination is a significant feature of the lives of ethnic minority women. We then analysed participants' accounts to argue that this view was not shared by them. We suggested that the way

in which participants' accounted for discrimination as specific to certain people and work situations and not to personal experience was a way of resisting the passive identities imputed to them. We finally discussed that the accounts portray a move towards more subtle forms of discrimination. We argued therefore that while these were still difficult issues to contend with, the reduction in overt racism suggests that to some extent race-relations was working.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Goriah is a term used by Urdu, Hindi speaking ethnic minorities for the white people.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **ATTITUDES AND IDENTITIES**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In chapter 5 we discussed that cultural explanations were offered to explain why ethnic minority women chose to work or chose to do a particular kind of work. In this chapter we shall explore this further by reviewing literature and also by analysing some participants' responses which address the attitudes of their communities to women working. The dominant view is that ethnic minority communities are not supportive of women working. Others like Bachu (1988) in her study of Sikh women in Britain have pointed out that work has changed the position of women and has given them a new identity. Our participants orient to both these understandings and their accounts reflect this.

#### **ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES AND WOMEN WORKING**

As mentioned above the 'dominant' view is that ethnic minority women are not encouraged to work by their communities. A number of reasons are offered for this attitude among the minority community members. The first one is the way in which the concepts of 'honour' and 'shame' are used in relation to women working. A number of academics and laypersons have shown that communities use these words as a means of discouraging ethnic minority women from working. Wilson (1979) discusses that notions of *Izzet* (honour) and *Sharm* (shame) are used by South Asian communities, namely Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi communities in the context of women's employment. Afshar (1994), in a study of Muslim women in West Yorkshire, has similarly discussed how her participants spoke of 'family honour' in the context of sending women out to work. The study provides a number of examples to argue that the Muslim communities have this attitude. One example Afshar offers is that of two sisters belonging to a Pakistani millworking family. Both these women were brought up according to the religious and cultural norms.

However they left their homes, changed their lifestyles and went to pursue jobs in a different city. The young women's families were shamed and 'ostracised' and in turn they refused to have contact with the women. Yet another example offered by her is that of a young woman whose parents and in-laws both disapproved of her working. Afshar further points out that from the time girls reach the secondary school stage they are closely monitored on account of 'family honour'. In Brah's (1994) study of South-Asian Muslim women also participants spoke of notions of honour and shame.

Some of the other cultural reasons provided for South-Asian women's non-participation in the labour market is that women going out to work can be viewed as the male member(s)' inability to provide for the economic maintenance of the household (Afshar, 1994). The large families of the ethnic minority communities and the resulting consequence of women having to do a large part of the housework is also provided as yet another reason for women not being encouraged to work.

Loyalty to family businesses and patriarchal ideologies also ensure that ethnic minority women work within the family and not go for employment outside. Ogun-dipe-Leslie (1993) has pointed out the operation of patriarchal ideology in devaluing women's work and restricting women to particular work among the African cultures. Baxter and Raw (1988) in a study of Chinese women working in the catering industry have similarly discussed how Chinese women are restricted to working in family businesses because of the operating patriarchal ideologies and family needs. She points out that as a consequence of competition in the catering business family members which include wives and daughters are recruited at low pay into the business. Baxter and Raw further argue that many women working in the family businesses have no wage except what they negotiate from their husbands, fathers, or sons on a weekly basis. They argue that women are exploited and oppressed in this system.

Finally, marriage and motherhood are treated as important signifiers of



women's identity. Afshar (1994:128) points out that while this is the case for all women, for Muslim women the cultural norm is enhanced ideologically through endorsement by the Prophet of Islam and the Holy Quran. So for women marriage and motherhood are given greater importance than doing other things such as going out for employment.

We now move on to consider the consequences the above discussed cultural and religious understandings bring to bear on ethnic minority women. We begin by considering its effect on the identities of the women. The identity of ethnic minority women is portrayed as submissive and passive by members of other communities on the basis of the understanding that they submit to the various cultural constraints imposed on them. Brah (1994:158) points out that there is a long history of orientalism in both academic and lay discourses and practices. She says that the oriental female is seen as ruthlessly oppressed and in need of liberation. Parmar (1982: 251) argues that the stereotype of the 'passive' and 'helpless victim' is not just conferred on Asian women. She argues that this is the case for other migrant women such as women from North Africa and Morocco. She further argues that migrant women from the Caribbean, Ghana and Indian sub-continent or Southern Europe have all had to fight the hostile forces of imperialism and its consequences.

Because of the assumed passivity and the assumed role of cultural restraints on their lives, ethnic minority women are treated inappropriately by other communities or taken advantage of (Parmar, 1982, Carby, 1982 and Brah, 1994). Parmar (1982) argues that patriarchal power relations are reproduced in the work place to control ethnic minority women. She provides an example of the experiences of Asian women who participated in a strike at Grunwick a factory processing films in N. W. London in 1977. She says that the manager George Ward used the concept of 'family honour' and cultural constraints to spread rumours about the striking women as 'loose women'. The purpose of which was that the women would cease

striking fearing ostracism from their communities. Parmar points out how exaggerated understandings of Asian cultural ideas of the role of Asian women was manipulated in this case.

So in this way the 'dominant view' of communities not encouraging women to work is perpetuated and also continues to structure ethnic minority women's lives. However of late a few studies have started to point out that such as situation is changing. Families are becoming used to the idea that women work. Further ethnic minority women themselves are resisting the imposition of these norms on them. Baxter and Raw (1988) argue that Chinese women are no longer content to accept the cultural constraints placed on them. Stopes-Roe and Cochrane (1990) in their study of Asian-British have pointed out that some members of the community are supportive of women working. In our study we did find some support for these ideas. Some participants did speak of change. Moreover all the participants were oriented to the understanding that their communities should have a particular view about women working. We now proceed to analyse our participants' responses when asked by the interviewer about the attitudes of their communities towards working women.

## **DENYING KNOWLEDGE OF ATTITUDES**

In extract (1) the participant responds to the interviewer's question by saying she has no knowledge of the attitudes of 'other groups'. She warrants for her lack of knowledge by providing some information about her lack of interaction with or interest in others. In line 2 she states that she is in her 'own nutshell'.

Extract (1)

**Pakistani H.S.M.W.S 1**

- 1 I so do you think attitudes of the community to working women has changed  
2 or do you think its there and how far would you say it has changed now  
3 R I don't know about any of the other groups I don't know basically I'm in my  
4 own nutshell  
5 I I mean from your personal experience say your mothers or somebody what

- 6 would their attitudes be to you working  
 7 **R** I don't know

The participant's response does not answer the interviewer's question. The interviewer's question was focused on the participant's community. The interviewer orienting to the inadequacy of the question asks R a further question clarifying what exactly she was looking for. Moreover when asking the second question the interviewer orients to the fact that asking R only about personal experience may not produce an answer. The participant had already refused to provide a personal opinion by stating her isolated position. The interviewer's second question therefore invites the participant to respond by either talking about her personal experience or about another member of her family's experience or someone else from a wider circle of her acquaintances. Thus in lines 5-6 the interviewer begins by asking the participant to say something about her personal experience but modifies it to her mothers experience or somebody else's. However the participant does not pick up on any of these and she explicitly states in the following turn that she does not know. From the participant's refusal to produce an attitude in response to the second question we can argue that the first response made by the participant is also a strategy to avoid producing the expected response and not because the participant has misunderstood.

In the next few extracts we do not find such explicit denials as in extract (1). The participants use other strategies to avoid producing the expected answer.

### **ATTITUDES ARE VARIED**

In the following extract T initially responds by providing an account which states that women worked through financial necessity.

Extract (2)

**Pakistani.H.S. S.S1**

- 1 **I** And how did you, do you think the communities reacted to these women who  
 2 started working and doing things and  
 3 **T** ahm ..  
 4 **I** do they react now or

5 T I, well I, I was, I grew, I was brought up and grew up in England, and I was  
 6 till I was eighteen in the west Midlands, and then quite a lot of women who  
 7 went out to work out of financial necessity, and that was completely  
 8 I It was okay  
 9 T different kettle of fish  
 10 I mm  
 11 T Yah, I mean I'm sure the men didn't like it very much, but  
 12 I it was okay  
 13 T because they couldn't have afforded to live otherwise, you know and there's a  
 14 lot of home workers as well there were a lot of my mum's friends, who took  
 15 into sewing and sewed all day and half the night, try and make whatever, they  
 16 brought pittance of how many pence they got per garment or something, you  
 17 know this is the case of exploitation of black women ahm, in the labour  
 18 I That's right  
 19 T You know, and and that's unfortunate  
 20 I and also it happens from members of the same community  
 21 T Exactly, exactly, because most of the people ((I: slight laughter)) who worked  
 22 in the factories  
 23 I companies  
 24 T Yah, and sort of clothing manufacturers, they were all from same  
 25 communities, but they had no qualms whatsoever about exploiting their  
 26 women, yah.  
 27 I which is obviously, but ahm, how do you think then with women going out,  
 28 now it's not like, it is changing  
 29 T It is changing the men going for much higher jobs  
 30 I that's right  
 31 T and better jobs  
 32 I that's right  
 33 T and, I mean it is still there, I mean it is still there, it is not to say to that we  
 34 are still not the factory that there is no factory stage and there's nothing  
 35 I there are women, how do you think the community then sees women who are  
 36 coming out stronger and?  
 37 T Ahm, I don't know. I think sections of the community will find it quite  
 38 intimidating, definitely. Ahm, I think, and you see that just in amongst,  
 39 although mem members of our extended family are really wary of my sister  
 40 and I, you know, who can't understand why we want to work, you know.  
 41 I suppose the other assumption is that, that's fine for us to work now, but  
 42 when we get married then of course it's going to stop as soon as the kids are  
 43 born it's going to stop. I think that will be crunch time, and  
 44 I think that's crunch time for many women who do work you know, that's  
 45 almost acceptable for you to earn your own money and save your money,  
 46 probably for your own dowry  
 47 I ((slight laughter)) it's useful ((laughter))  
 48 T exactly, exactly, but then when it comes to a, marriage, it will still be right  
 49 now your your career is, you know, secondary to your husband's and stuff, I'm  
 50 sure that is the case, you know. I've seen it happen to friends and  
 51 to others. There are other situations where it doesn't happen ahm, but on the  
 52 whole that is still a barrier that women have to overcome.

- 53 I I think it is a universal barrier isn't it?  
54 T It is, definitely  
55 I when it comes to careers as you were saying that  
56 T mm  
57 I it's always that the male's career is seen as the  
58 T primary one  
59 I Yah  
60 T the more important one

However what the interviewer is expecting is the formulation of 'an' attitude. That this is the interviewer's expectation is obvious from what the interviewer says in the following turn. The interviewer interrupts T's account and makes an assessment of the community's attitude from T's account. The interviewer says 'it was okay' implying that the community is therefore positive about women working. T does not affirm the interviewer's assessment but instead argues that the circumstances which resulted in women working were special. She says in line 9 it was a 'different kettle of fish'. Moreover T goes on further to add 'I'm sure the men didn't like it very much' (line 11) but then discounts its significance by adding that women had to work because of financial necessity. It is interesting to note that once again the interviewer finishes off T's statement when she talks of men not liking it very much. The interviewer orients to the fact that T's 'but' after she had stated men's views suggests that she is going to downplay it in some way. The interviewer therefore once again interrupts and makes an assessment that it was all right for women to work. What the interviewer is trying to do is to get the participant to agree to the community as having 'an' attitude. However as we pointed out earlier T's answer does not affirm an attitude but just suggests that the basis for women working is because of the special circumstances. T then launches into an account of how women working in factories were exploited. However the interviewer is still not satisfied with this response. We find this is the case in the interviewers further questions in lines 27-28 and lines 35 -36. The interviewer is still wanting T to make some assessment of attitude.

After these further questions in line 37 T finally provides the kind of answer



expected by the question and what informs the question. Even then her answer is not straightforward. She begins by stating that there is some difficulty with making an assessment. In line 37 she says 'I don't know'. She then goes on to formulate the community's attitude but in ways that does not portray their attitude as negative or disapproval but rather as incomprehension or that they are uncertain or apprehensive. In line 40 she says 'they can't understand'. In line 39 she says that they are 'really wary' and in line 38 she says that some find it 'intimidating'. Her cautious reply thus allows T to respond to the persistent questioning of the interviewer but at the same time without compromising and naming 'an' attitude.

Further when T discusses attitude she does not state that this is the general case, or that this is what everyone thinks. She specifies that this is what 'sections of the community' (line 37) and some 'members of her extended family' (line 39) think. The implied contrast is that the 'immediate family' does not think in this way. So in this way the difficulties the community has with women working is particularised to only some people. She then goes further to argue that such attitudes are also relevant to particular periods in a woman's life, namely after marriage.

Finally in lines 50-60 she provides an account which suggests that the problem should not be viewed as the community not wanting women to work but a question of whose career is important. She states that the issue is male versus female career. She argues that after marriage it is the male career which is given preference. She supports her claim by making reference to personal knowledge, that she has seen it 'happen to friends'. So in this way T formulates community attitude as not one but flexible and as relevant only to certain people and certain situations. She also restates the issue as that of male versus female career.

In T's account we observed that through the use of a number of strategies T avoids naming an attitude. In the next account the participant explicitly states that 'it varies a lot'. The implied contrast being that there is not one attitude.

Extract (3)

Indian H.S.S.S1

1 **I** What do you say, I mean, coming from the younger generation, and being in  
2 employment, what would you say is the attitude of the community to  
3 employed women?

4 **R** I think it varies a lot I think, ahm, I don't think it's good I, I'm lucky my sister  
5 and I are both very lucky because my parents are very cool even my mum to a  
6 certain extent my mum has always pushed and always supported us. Ahm, but  
7 I think the community doesn't view it seriously

8 **I** mm, for working women.

9 **R** Ya, I don't think they view it serious, you know. It's things like you know,  
10 you have to kind of a, there is always this marriage especially when you sort  
11 of get to my age when you sort of, there is always this cloud hanging over you  
12 that you have to go and get married to somebody to support you you know  
13 my argument is, wait a minute, I am probably earning more than half the  
14 males in the community. What do you mean, somebody to support me? You  
15 know, you know I get very opinionated about things like this my mum is like  
16 that ((I: laughter)) and my sister is to some extent as well, because I just  
17 think, no, wait a minute, that's not, I don't think they take it seriously very  
18 much, when I you know I do think, I'm in a very position with a very good  
19 salary, and I just think, no wait a minute, I'm probably, I will probably  
20 support him, which is fine that's not the issue, but I just wish people would  
21 take it more seriously and give respect to yous and specially

22 **I** Ya

23 **R** Ya, and I don't think people respect it. I think it's, you know certainly, a,  
24 maybe again the people I know who know who knew me as an accountant  
25 you know I know somebody, one of my friends who just qualified as an  
26 account, an Indian chap, and there was a big party, a big kind of hoo-haw  
27 passes his hands and I just think, wait a minute, what about me, what about  
28 my sister, what about my other friend S who passed, an Indian friend. You  
29 know why is there no big fanfare them. Why is there no big, why are people  
30 not respecting that me all is people say is when they meet you, how is the job,  
31 what are you doing again? Whereas if you are a male, people take more  
32 notice and that for me is frustrating, because I have worked, and I think, no,  
33 wait a minute, I'm doing really good, I'm doing pretty well here. You know,  
34 that probably sounds big-headed, but I, I'm, I know what exactly I have  
35 achieved and, I don't make any bones about it.

36 **I** But it's also about the community's sort of taking on board and saying, okay,  
37 there is somebody who has

38 **R** yes

39 **I** stuck up as well as done it

40 **R** That's right, it's frustrating, it is. And especially when, ahm, you know even  
41 though you are, you know .. it's just .. it's odd, it just people wouldn't just  
42 even recognise what you are doing. As I said I think I am lucky because my  
43 family as well as my extended family, my cousins etc., are very like my

- 44 parents. The girls are all kind of went on to do quite well. Ahm, so it's  
 45 probably different there but I, with that, you know when you go to the  
 46 mandir, when you go to these places you know people would just don't, don't  
 47 recognise it or don't respect it all, which is odd, but  
 48 **I** But that's the ((slight laughter))  
 49 **R** That's the cult(ure)  
 50 **I** That's the attitude  
 51 **R** That's the culture

The participant then goes on to formulate their attitude's through use of a variety of terms namely, 'not good' (line 4), 'doesn't view it seriously' (lines 7,17,21), don't respect (lines 21, 47) and 'don't recognise it' (line 42,47). Once again what we observe is that community attitude is portrayed as flexible. Moreover when formulating these attitudes the participant makes them as complaints. Each time she makes a complaint, she also provides a supporting example. The complaint that the community does not view women's work seriously is supported by arguing that the community does not consider that she is capable of taking care of herself. She argues that even though she has a good profession, namely accountant, has achieved quite a bit such as a good position and good salary (lines 18-19) the expectation is that she should get married and be supported by a man. That this is a valid complaint is reinforced by stating that she is actually earning more than 'half the males in the community' (line 13). Moreover the implied contrast in T's complaint is that a man in R's position would be considered as capable of supporting a family. So R's complaint portrays the community as not taking her work and women's work in general seriously.

In her second example R provides a contrast between how a male friend who qualified as an accountant was felicitated by the community and how she, her sister and a female friend (implied as female friend) were not (lines 25-29). She argues therefore that the community does not respect women's career. Her third example is that members of the community don't even remember what she does. She says that when they meet her they don't even remember what she is. She says that they ask her

"What are you doing again?" The use of reported speech implies that it really did happen (Wooffitt, 1992). Reported speech orients to the truth status of claims. So in this way R complains about the Indian community as 'not valuing women's work'. What is interesting and what this shares with the earlier account is that the complaints do not portray the community as being negative to women working but as giving more importance to men and their careers.

However R's complaints can be seen as unreasonable. She could be just seen as jealous or envious and as wanting attention for herself. R in making her complaints orients to this and addresses this in her accounting. R through mentioning her status and achievements has created the impression that she deserves respect. The discrepancy between the lack of respect and what she deserves makes her complaint reasonable. Secondly when contrasting how she as female is 'not respected' she contrasts with an Indian male. However she describes him as a friend and also characterises him as a Indian chap. So it discounts any personal reasons that R may have against that person. Also when accounting that she can support a man R downplays the significance of what she said by adding 'it is fine that's not the issue' (line 20). What this does is to discount any potential inference that R is acting in a proud manner. Finally, R explicitly states that her expecting the community to respect what she does may sound 'big-headed' but discounts it by pointing out that she has a valid reason for making her complaints.

Having formulated the attitudes of the community in this flexible way the participant then goes on to suggest that her family and extended family are exceptions. The participant says in line 5 'my parents are cool'. She points out that 'even her mum' has been supportive. She orients to the understanding that women are expected to be more traditional and therefore her stating of her mum's actions supports her claim that her family is an exception. She provides an example of how other women in her extended family were also supported and did well in their careers

(line 44). This further supports the kind of identity she has created for her family. R also labels the behaviour of her community, namely not respecting and recognising women's work as 'odd' (lines 41, 47). This once again reinforces that such a behaviour is unusual and that there are other sections of the community who did not share this view and who have changed. She finally produces an upshot which describes this type of behaviour as the 'culture' of the community.

### **ATTITUDE IS 'SLIGHTLY DISAPPROVING'**

In the next extract the participant once again formulates the attitude of the community in a mild way. She responds to the interviewer's question and says that the attitude of the community is 'slightly disapproving' (lines 3, 8-9). She also portrays their attitude as something that they think about. Attitude is portrayed as contingent on feelings rather than actual actions. In this way attitude is portrayed as a flexible thing.

Extract (4)

**African. H.S.M.W.S1**

- 1 I so do you think the attitudes of the community what you have described or  
2 not described to working women is approving or disapproving  
3 R slightly disapproving I think since I moved here because most of them people  
4 I close friends I'm in contact I've only got two women that I'll say relatively  
5 close friends up here and one is a housewife even though she'd like to work  
6 she can't make up her mind what she wants to do and the other love to be a  
7 housewife and they are ok they are fine about but in general everyone else I  
8 know stays at home once they have children and I find they slightly  
9 disapprove what I do what I do I think it's at the back of their mind.

Having formulated community attitude in this way R makes an exception for her close friends. She says in line 7 that 'they are ok'. So like the earlier extracts the participant avoids producing a negative attitude for the community and simultaneously formulates members of her close circle as exceptions.

### **'NOT A PROBLEM ANYMORE'**

In the following extracts the participants use yet another strategy to avoid naming a



'negative' attitude as expected by the question.

Extract (5)

**Indian H.S.S.S1**

- 1 **I** ... I mean in general whoever is that you define as your community, what do  
2 you think is their attitudes to women going to work and being more  
3 independent and doing their own things  
4 **R** That's fine, it's not a problem, we are always equal  
5 **I** mm  
6 **R** I think that's perhaps not an issue within within our community,  
7 **I** mm,  
8 **R** it's always been yah, fairly, a fair amount of my family as well,  
9 it's personal choice  
10 **I** mm. So there has always been support or encouragement?  
11 **R** Yah, my, and my Dad's very very open independent  
12 encouraging person my mum got married you know when she knew nothing,  
13 she came from a little town in Punjab in India. And he always encouraged her  
14 and taught her things when she came here, and told her to go and work and 15  
make friends  
16 **I** mm  
17 **R** and being independent, and as a result my mother and father are very  
18 independent people  
19 **I** mm  
20 **R** and do their things together but they have their separate lives as well

R explicitly states that there is 'no problem' (line 4) in response to the interviewer's question. Her reply suggests that she considers the question as meriting a negative formulation as a response. Moreover R goes on to provide an explanation as to why she thinks that the community does not view women working as problematic.

She begins by stating that 'we are always equal' (line 4). What this implies is that men and women are treated equally. She then goes on to say that it is not an issue within her community and her family. Her statement 'I think that's perhaps not an issue within our community' (line 6) suggests that she is orienting to the existence of negative attitudes elsewhere but not in her community. The interviewer treats R's response as a portrayal of positive attitude and so she asks a further question of whether there is support and encouragement for women working. Since R has spoken of both her community and family the interviewer's question can be

applicable to both. However R only focuses on her family and provides us with a personal example of how her father was supportive of her mother. Through stating the place where her mother was from, namely a small town in India she is able to characterise her mother as a stereotypical Indian woman. She then formulates that it was her father who supported her mother to make friends and to work and therefore made her mother independent. The contrast between what her mother was and is presently enables R to argue that the reason for change was her father's attitude.

In the next two extracts the participants' argue that negative attitude is restricted to a former period and therefore is no longer a problem.

Extract (6)

**African. L.S.M.W.S1**

- 1 **G** Most definitely, you know, in our country, it's not your father's decision; it's  
2 like your brother, and your father, your uncle, your mum, all those people can  
3 be involved in the decision. So most of my brother doesn't like the idea and  
4 unfortunately in my country people or the girls who start working like done a  
5 lot of mistakes which I don't blame them for it, because the atmosphere is just  
6 new and if you really don't know what you are really doing, you might get in  
7 trouble, and because of that, this catches after us  
8 **I** okay  
9 **G** give everybody the impression that no no no, so maybe most anybody in my  
10 family say no  
11 **I** uh  
12 **G** nobody is happy about the idea  
13 **G & I** ((laughter))  
14 **I** So nobody was supportive  
15 **G** no no only, the only thing which support me is my really would will  
16 and my tears. I tried a lot for it  
17 And really fought for it.  
(a few lines later)  
18 **G** ..and after that I worked for a very long time, and even they in my family,  
19 they started to change their idea which is very great, which is very great. I felt  
20 like I've been a very good example for any other girl she would like to go, she  
21 will talk about how I succeed and how she would do the same  
22 **I** Okay. In a sense you set a start, a precedent for everybody ((laughter))  
23 **G** absolutely  
24 **I** within your family. So do you think it is your family, or would you say  
25 generally that these were the attitudes in the community also?  
26 **G** It is the general attitude in the community. And a but, I am really honest to  
27 say that, after there is ( ) a ( ) two groups of girls who go to

28 work, after ( ) the idea became very popular. And they feel like why  
 29 not, they after seeing that they are doing their, and even the people in the  
 30 office I did really feel like, if there is something very important and they  
 31 wanted to be done in care, they always give the responsibility to the girls to  
 32 do it. So they start to understand how important and how the other ideas like  
 33 girls can't do it, women are not good at it is start to come, you see, clear

Extract (7)

**Chinese. L.S.M.W.S1**

1 **I** it is there some cases its individual thing there is no general attitude that  
 2 whether they disapprove or approve  
 3 **C** I think in ancient ancient times in the Chinese in the Chinese community  
 4 there is a tradition say women must stay at home thats the must ahm you  
 5 know no education and things like that I think I think applies to different  
 6 countries like Japan or India but now once women have a choice to receive  
 7 education things are changing  
 8 **R** I still is still a lot of men think they don't want their wife to work you know if  
 9 they can support their wives but nowadays the women they won't listen they  
 10 won't bother what they think they'll just have their own mind they determine  
 11 their own life I would say so because a years ago the women will listen will  
 12 obey but now ahm I think the women are more independent  
 13 **C** its different its different maybe maybe in ancient times the women they need  
 14 to obey doesn't mean they want to obey ((laughter)) receive education only  
 15 source to support they can afford to say I'm not going to obey whereas I feel  
 16 its quite natural but now they receive education they have the so they are  
 17 little bit more or they dare to say no I'm not listening to you because I can  
 18 support myself .

In extract (6) G begins with providing some background information of the individuals who influence women's decisions to work in her culture, namely brother, father, uncle and mum . She also provides information that their attitudes are dependent on women's behaviour when they go to work. She describes two groups of girls who go to work (line 27). She characterises one group of girls as those who did 'mistakes' when they went out to work (line 5). What is implied is that the girls did what was not culturally acceptable. These circumstances are then portrayed as the cause of the community being negative towards sending women out to work. G's characterising of the first group of women could be heard as her being critical of them. G orients to this and downplays it by providing excuses for the women's

behaviour. She says that they were in a new atmosphere and also points out that they were ignorant about how to behave in a work situation (lines 5-7). Similarly in extract (7) the participant provides some background information about the Chinese culture in the past and how as a consequence of this women did not go out to get educated. She reinforces this by stating that this happened not only in China but also elsewhere by naming a few other countries. Moreover these women are portrayed as submissive to the cultural norms. So what we find is that formulating community as not positive to women working is restricted to certain situations and also to a particular period.

The participants in both the extracts then proceed to argue that the situation has changed. The reason for the change is portrayed through contrasting the identity of women they had discussed earlier as different to the identity of another group of women (extract 6), or as in extract (7) today's Chinese women. Thus in extract (6) the participant points out that there was another group of women (lines 30-31) who were responsible and did their work properly in contrast to the group of women who 'made mistakes'. These women's actions are portrayed as changing the attitude of their community. The participant also provides a personal example of how she herself was a good example when she went to work reinforcing that not all women behaved in the same way. In extract (7) the Chinese women of today are portrayed as not accepting the cultural norms but as independent. The participant's account suggests that attitudes are not really relevant to the present context. This we observe from what the participant says. The participant does concede that still men 'don't want their wife (wives) to work' (line 8) but discounts its relevance because the context has changed.

So in this way both the participants portray negative attitudes as restricted to particular a period of time and to certain situations. By formulating context as changed participants are able to treat the interviewer's expectation that they should

formulate an attitude as irrelevant.

## **WORKING IS DEPENDENT ON PRAGMATIC REASONS**

In the next extract the participant specifies that there are two types of attitude. In line 3 she says that there are two categories.

Extract (8)

**African L.S.M.W.S1**

- 1 **I** Ya :: So how is the attitude of the Kenyan community towards women going  
2 to work and doing different things?  
3 **S** Oh :: is divided into two categories, I would say,  
4 **I** mm.  
5 **S** The village and the town. Town life demands that you go to work.  
6 Village life demands that women stay home, do the work, and the men go out  
7 to work. But in town both have to go to work. And of course the lifestyle in  
8 town also dictates, because they have very high rents, even though some of  
9 them have the land back home in the villages, but then it also means that they  
10 have to pay fees, because you know that there we always pay fees  
11 **I** Yes, for education  
12 **S** Then they still have to pay the people they left in the villages. So both, in  
13 town women do not stay about doing nothing, they go to work, as well as  
14 men  
15 **I** And it is encouraged for financial reasons  
16 **S** Yes, but back in the villages, is the women who stay at home and do the bulk  
17 of the work and all that and the men go out, to work, even some go as far as  
18 where they live for a long long time. We may not see them for a year,  
19 till when they get their annual leave, then they come home, or they visit.

S describes two situations, namely town situation and village situation. The town context is formulated as necessitating women to go out and work. In lines 7-12 she provides an explanation that women in the town work because of higher costs of living and because of the commitments to support those they have left in the villages. The interviewer at this point intervenes and makes an assessment of S's account of the town situation. The interviewer makes an assessment that 'women are encouraged' in the town situation to work. The interviewer's assessment taken along with what S had stated initially, namely that there are 'two categories' could suggest



that attitude for the other category should be negative.

S orients to this when she describes the village situation. She formulates village situation as requiring women to stay at home and work. It is important to note that she states that women in the villages 'do the bulk of the work' (16-17). She supports her statement by giving an example of male members going far away to work and not returning to their homes for even a year. So what S does through her accounting is to point out that is that women do work irrespective of where they are. In this way S avoids making a negative assessment of the attitudes of those in the villages. Moreover her entire accounting is oriented to portraying 'going' or 'not going' out to work as a consequence of the practical needs of the situation, thereby treating the 'attitude question' posed by the interviewer as irrelevant.

### **CHALLENGING 'AN' ATTITUDE**

So far we have been pointing out the various strategies participants used to avoid producing 'an' (negative) attitude as expected by the interviewer's question. In this extract one of the participants responds affirmatively to the interviewer's question, thereby accepting the existence of 'an' attitude. We find that this is immediately challenged by another participant in the group.

Extract (9)

**Pakistani H.S. M. W. S1**

- 1 **I** do you think still there is some resistance from the communities there is an  
2 attitude to working women  
3 **R** ya I think  
4 **S** ya it is but things are changing its changed  
5 **T** what about Bradford and places like that maybe Edinburgh community is  
6 small and  
7 **R** I was actually brought up in Yorkshire in Hadowfield there's a lot of ethnic  
8 minority there and it always varied depending on the family they come from  
9 and what you want to do for yourself obviously some people are influenced  
10 for instance my friends families is influenced by his cousin or what  
11 everybody else thought and I was fortunate that my father was not like that it  
12 does it depends not only on yourself but people who you live with your

- 13 family your circle around you some people find its worth breaking out to do  
14 what you want others feel its not worth the effort and the consequences

S another participant in the group partially accepts what R has said by acknowledging the existence of resistance from the communities to women working. She however goes on to produces a challenge to R's straightforward affirmation that there is resistance by stating that attitude is changed. In line 4 S begins by stating that attitude 'is changing' but completes her sentence by stating that it has 'changed'. So in this way S explains away the negative attitude, and therefore downgrades its significance. Another participant T also produces a challenge to R by stating that resistance may be particularised to some places and not others. T argues that maybe R's experience is based on a small place and that it may be different in a larger place.

R responds to these challenges by stating that she has lived in a bigger place, Yorkshire (line 7). Her stating this is a response to T's challenge that her knowledge may be limited to a small place. She then goes on to argue from personal experience that attitudes are 'varied'. She offers an explanation to support her claim. She says that resistance to women working is present for some people (line 9) and some families (line 10). She says that some people are influenced by 'what everybody else thought'. Her formulation portrays the existence of 'an' attitude but elsewhere. Her further account of the difficulties individuals have to overcome to work also suggests the existence of an attitude. At the same time she discounts the existence of such an attitude in her immediate family. In lines 11-12 she says that her father was not like that. R's formulation of attitudes as variable allows her to maintain her initial affirmation to the interviewer's question, at the same time she is able to work with the challenges and state that there could be exceptions by drawing on personal experience.

## PORTRAYING POSITIVE ATTITUDES

In the last two extracts the participants portray their communities as supporting and encouraging women working.

Extract (10)

**Indian H.S. M.W.S1**

- 1 **I** What do you think are present day attitudes of the community or whatever  
2 you have defined as community to working women and going out to work do  
3 you think there is still support and encouragement to go further and  
4 **J** certainly the community the community that I was describing as community  
5 very much so and in fact all the role models that I have within the in my  
6 growing up like my mother worked my grandmother worked she went to the  
7 shop they had their own business she went to the shop and she was very much  
8 a very active partner in the business it wasn't just a case of you come and do  
9 this little bits you know so and within the community I was speaking about is  
12 a lot of encouragement and infact fifty sixty odd years ago where things were  
11 very different the kind of message that we would have got within the  
12 community is that you know in those countries where education has to be  
13 paid for right from day one the kind of the kind of guidelines or the guidance  
14 whatever you would call it would be you know if you have enough money to  
15 just educate one child and you had a boy and a girl you educate the girl  
16 which is like totally contrary to what you normally hear and the idea was that  
17 if you do that then that when she grows up and becomes a mother can teach a  
18 lot more to her kids whereas the boy will know how to fend for himself he  
19 get manual jobs or whatever but its not essential for him to have education  
20 because education in that sense is only useful for him and his livelihood  
21 whereas it was kind of being thought of as a general passing knowledge on  
22 from generation to generation and bringing out that attitude change.  
23 **R** Ismaili community? oh right  
24 **J** because education is very much emphasised and not just education for the  
25 sake of and therefore the economic independence that goes with it  
26 **R** I mean they gave the preference to the girl as opposed to  
27 **J** so what you find even now within the community organisation  
28 **R** very strange  
29 **J** yes it is very unusual and you'd find even now if you look at the community  
30 organisations institutions you'll get women in very high positions very much  
31 even if they are volunteering they will be in those kinds of positions but there  
32 is the issue of male dominance comes into it there is a constant kind of  
33 tension and conflict but thats very healthy that that is there that shows there is  
34 the issue that is equally recognised with the women so its a very different  
35 kind of message that I would have got ah considering if you look at the Indian  
36 background where it is very much about  
37 **S** thats right same thing about me I don't represent all India I come from a  
38 family which I'm the fourth generation of my grandmother ran her own  
39 business my great grandmother was educated my grandmother sisters were

40 doctors and principals of colleges and all my mothers sisters and all the're all  
41 educated whether they worked or not they all had their degrees same thing for  
42 my in-laws my mother-in-law is seventy three years old she was a consultant  
43 and her mother was a lawyer and her brothers and sisters all came to and I  
44 come from a third generation where women are all even from S's dads side  
45 which is very middle class all the women were teachers there so they all  
46 so all the three aunts were teachers his grandmother was a brahma  
47 she was a revolutionary she fought for independence she was in jail and  
48 they were all independent women so I don't totally represent a typical  
49 Indian in that way everybody was treated quite equally from education  
50 point of view though again there was this question of male  
51 dominance because I felt some of these very educated aunts of mine  
52 were doctors didn't take up proper jobs because their husbands were  
53 on transferable jobs and they were moving around and they could never  
54 have permanent jobs inspite of being doctors they used to do voluntary  
55 my mother-in-law as long as they were with her husband she was  
56 divorced she was in Kenya and they were in Rio she was a doctor she had a  
57 wonderful job in Delhi and she used to only do sort of free social work in  
58 hospitals locally till they moved to London where she got a job you know so  
59 and she was actually better qualified than my father-in-law but she was  
60 always on the move thats where there is a conflict where the women leaves  
61 her inspite of her but the education does help

J in extract (10) affirms the existence of support and encouragement implicated in the question. She then reinforces by describing the existence of (female) role models. In line 6 she says that her mother and grandmother worked. The role models she describes are members of her family. J actually begins by saying that these role models were from 'within the' (community). Although J does not finish her statement it can be heard as 'community'. Without finishing the statement J repairs it and produces a personalised account, of how these positive role models were there in her 'growing up' period. J is possibly orienting to the understanding that usually the attitude of the community is negative. So personalising her account manages the implication that this may not be the case for everyone. J further continues with this personal account to portray her community as encouraging in a number of ways. When J provides details of her mother and grandmother working, she initially only mentions that they worked. She then upgrades it to mention that her grandmother was an 'active partner in the business' (line 8). What this does is reinforce the fact that the women in her family were not 'just passing their time' but doing 'real work'.



J's statement that they were not just doing 'little bits' affirms that this is the purpose of characterising her grandmother in this way. However this personalised account could still be viewed by her listeners as inadequate evidence of community encouragement. J orients to this and therefore she provides two further evidences which makes a special case for her community to be viewed as encouraging women working. First, she gives an account of the importance given to female education (lines 11-22). She makes a contrast between the benefits of educating males and females. The contrast suggests that the community considered that it was beneficial to educate females than males. Second, she also points out that women were given high positions within the community organisation. She states that this behaviour of the community is contrary to what is usually the case (line 16), and also adds that it is unusual (line 29) reinforcing that this is a 'special case'. So in this way J uses her personal experience and some unusual characteristics of her community to portray her community as encouraging.

S, another participant, also states in a similar way that the female members of her family were educated and that they worked. Moreover she also provides information which described their work as high status work. She further mentions the different generations they belonged to (line 38). Her stating that she is the fourth generation of working women further reinforces that her family was supportive of women working. The information she provides is rich in detail. Potter (1996) has discussed how details can be used to build the facticity of accounts. Here the details serve to support her claims that in her family women working is encouraged. S also portrays her family as an exception by stating right at the beginning that she does not represent all of India (line 37).

Having formulated particular groups, in J's case her religious community and in S's case her family as supportive, both participants contrast with other groups. In J's case she contrasts her Ismaili community with the Indian community (line 35 and



36). In S's account her family is contrasted with the Indian community as a whole. S says, 'I don't totally represent a typical Indian in that way' (lines 37 and 48). Without explicitly stating it the contrast brings out that less supportive attitudes exists within these contrasted groups. In this way the negative attitude is portrayed as being present elsewhere. However both participants also orient to the fact that their claims can be undermined. The participants therefore modify their accounts to talk of difficulties. Both participants refer to the issue of 'male dominance' as the reason for their difficulties. The focus on male dominance again deflects any assumption that the cause for women not going to work could be due to the negative attitudes of the community or family.

Extract (11)

**Indian L.S.M.W.S1**

- 1 **I** so when you started what was the attitude of the communities when you  
 2 started working was it encouraging for work or  
 3 **A** mm mm it was encouraging it was  
 4 **K** I didn't work with the ethnic minority community  
 5 **I** not working itself whatever job you did  
 6 **J** in those days maybe because it was a smaller number so maybe they don't  
 7 know you and you don't know them and things like that but they were very  
 8 very supportive they were you know helpful and things like that because I  
 9 started in if you started in office or somewhere like that people are educated  
 10 people there so maybe they know how to treat but I started in a clothing  
 11 factory  
 12 **A** there might be in other factors because we are all Indians because we have  
 13 got better what do you say  
 14 **J** lifestyle  
 15 **A** aha Indian understanding and lifestyle as well than Pakistani you have not  
 16 have anybody Pakistani here because their community might that person  
 17 might not  
 18 **K** think different  
 19 **A** think different they might not be that supportive supportive for women to  
 20 work because in our case again its a different people so don't take it a general  
 21 **I** yes of course as an Asian of course I'm interviewing different groups so I  
 22 would  
 23 **A** groups Bangladeshi you will hardly find anybody any women working  
 24 because their community is not supportive at all  
 25 **K** you see the Indian community mostly the womens are working

26 **A** different  
 27 **K** their way of thinking change as well  
 28 **A** it was always changed  
 29 **T** changed (overtalking)  
 30 **K** for better  
 31 **A** in India  
 32 **J** which sort of background you came from because my dad he was lecturer in  
 33 university imagine when I say oh dad I want to go to medical college or  
 34 something like that all the family is like things like that  
 35 **A** in India even villages from villages ladies are working now  
 36 **J** yes  
 37 **A** no problem teachers  
 39 **K** mostly teachers  
 40 **A** mostly teachers  
 41 **J** depends what sort of background  
 42 **A** so I don't think you should take it a general this is  
 43 **I** so you would say  
 44 **A** our Indian  
 45 **All** Indian Indian  
 46 **I** there is much more support and women are encouraged to work  
 47 **A** Pakistani women have lot of harassment from the community and the  
 48 Bengali women because of I'm telling you from my own experience and  
 49 working experience  
 50 **T** so what I've also noticed is that from Pakistani women nothing personal ok or  
 51 Bengali women they are not getting family support even though they've been  
 52 brought into this country no family support to learn make an effort to learn  
 53 English so thats that is very back like if they go to shops shopping wise or  
 54

Three of the participants respond to the interviewer's question. A, one of the participants, confirms that the community is supportive of women working (line 3). K treats the question as irrelevant to her through her statement in line 4, 'I didn't work with the ethnic minority communities'. J replies by making an exception to her situation. In lines 6-10 she points out that support was there only in certain jobs. So in this way the participants' initial responses vary. The participants then go on to jointly construct the Indian community as supportive by providing a number of reasons. The community's lifestyle, that a number of women are working and providing information that even women in Indian villages work, are provided as evidences to support their claim regarding the Indian community. One participant provides a personal experience of her father's support reinforcing the supportive

nature of the Indian community. What happens through this construction also is that a shared common identity is forged for the participants.

Having constructed the Indian community as supportive the participants contrast with other communities. In lines 15, 23-24, 47-50 the participants argue that other communities such as the Pakistani and the Bangladeshi community are not supportive of women working. She provides evidence that Pakistani women are in a backward position by providing an example of the difficulties the Pakistani women face in shopping, particularly since they don't have the language skills. The participants' also reinforce that this is the case by making their observations based on their personal experience. Thus in line 48 one participant says that she is talking from 'her own experience'. In line 50 another participant says 'I've noticed' that the Pakistani and Bengali women are not being encouraged and supported by their families to work. The contrast between the Indian community and the others brings out that the participants' community is positive about women working. It also discounts the relevance of what is expected in the interviewer's question.

In this study the participants were oriented to the expectation that they had to produce 'an' attitude. Moreover the participants also oriented to the understanding that the usual understanding is that ethnic minority communities have a negative attitude. Our analysis has pointed out the broad strategies, the components of these strategies and the conversation devices which were used by the participants to address this expectation and we summarise them here. What we found was that except in one case (extract 9) the participants did not affirmatively state a negative attitude for their communities. Even in this instance the affirmation of the participant was challenged by the others. What we found was that participants, through the following strategies, avoided producing 'an' attitude. Thus one participant explicitly refused to produce 'an' attitude (extract 1). Others, as in extract (2), (3) and (4), argued that attitudes were varied and flexible. Moreover sometimes

participants said that negative attitude was not a problem anymore (extracts 5, 6 and 7). Some pointed out that the question of attitude was irrelevant; it all depended on the pragmatic considerations of the situation (extract 8). There were also those who formulated a positive attitude for their communities and attributed less positive attitudes elsewhere (Extracts 9 and 10).

What we also observed was that these strategies consisted of a number of components. Some of the components which were shared between the extracts were: Attitude of their ethnic minority communities were not produced as strongly negative to women working. They were only formulated in mild ways. Moreover these less supportive attitudes were usually attributed to particular people, particular situations, particular periods of time. In other words these attitudes were always portrayed as existing 'elsewhere'. Simultaneously we observed that participants made exceptions for themselves, their families and sometimes their own communities as opposed to others. Moreover when participants did mention difficulties they formulated them as a 'male versus female' issue, often mentioned in their accounting as an issue of 'male dominance'. What also was made relevant in the accounts were particular identities for the women as independent, capable, and able to hold a variety of jobs. Further these components were constructed through the use of a variety of conversation devices such as contrast structures, providing examples, often personal examples, portraying personal knowledge and providing rich details.

### **DISCOUNTING 'AN' ATTITUDE - WHY?**

Earlier studies have used attitude scales to measure attitudes. The assumption in such studies is that there is 'an' attitude which can be measured. A further assumption is that the object being assessed by the individuals is also fixed. If the object is not formulated as a single entity then comparing the attitudes of different people becomes meaningless. From a discourse analytical perspective however,

Potter and Wetherell (1987) proceed to argue that the object is itself constructed in discourse in the course of doing the evaluation. This argument suggests that assuming working ethnic minority women to be a fixed category is not appropriate. Further the community whose attitudes are being assessed is also formulated flexibly in individuals' talk. In Chapter 3 we have discussed how community was formulated in different ways. Moreover Potter and Wetherell have also argued that attitudes themselves are formulated flexibly to address the interactional needs. In their 1987 study of white Newzealanders' attitudes towards Polynesian immigrants they have pointed out how conflicting versions of attitudes were formulated by the same respondent. They point out that the same respondent argued that Polynesians should be trained and then sent back and also that if Polynesians were given skills training they would stay back. From this Potter and Wetherell argue that it is very difficult to get to a single underlying attitude. It is therefore argued that discourse analysis and research which can understand variability are therefore useful methods to study attitude and also provide us a way of understanding different meanings.

In our study we found that participants moved away from the straightforward naming of 'an attitude' to formulate attitudes in many different ways. What this enabled the participants to do was to work with the expectations of the interviewer's question but in ways which included the understanding of different meanings. Moreover as we observed from our analysis, the flexible construction of attitudes enabled participants to avoid formulating their communities as having a negative attitude. We observed how participants used terms such as 'wary', 'disapproving', 'don't recognise', 'don't understand' to discuss community attitudes. However even when the participants formulated attitudes in these flexible, less strong terms, the potential negative implications of belonging to a group which was formulated as not so encouraging was still around. The participants were oriented to this because in their accounting they maintained that they, their families, close friends were



exceptions. What we therefore observe is some form of redressal of what is generally assumed about them in terms of culture, their ethnic identity. What is also interesting is that participants were willing to discuss difficulties on a topic that is common to all cultures, namely the issue of patriarchy. This further suggests that the issue is not with expressing difficulties *per se* but rather with expressing cultural difficulties. A possible reason for this could be that participants are assumed by the interviewer to be part of the community. The interviewer's question is heard as 'what are the attitudes of your community'. Hence if the participants named 'an' attitude the implication is that it is also their attitude. By using the various strategies to circumvent this the participants were able to avoid any negative implications to themselves. This is precisely why they could talk of male dominance rather than negative attitude of their communities. This is also why in extracts 10 and 11 negative attitudes could be imputed to other cultures in very specific ways in contrast to how attitudes of their cultures were constructed as flexible and in mild ways.

Another basis for our argument is that the participants in other contexts were quite prepared to talk of hardships and produced accounts of constraining cultural backgrounds. We observed this in chapter 5 when participants accounted for the influences on their choice to work. However in that case the accounting enabled the participants to talk of overcoming difficulties and did not have implications for the identity. By contrast as we have pointed out in our above discussion portraying cultural constraints would have implications for their identity and hence the resistance.

## **WOMEN'S IDENTITIES**

In our theoretical discussion at the beginning of the chapter we argued that a consequence of imputing negative attitudes to the communities or portraying communities as against women working was that ethnic minority women were viewed in particular ways. We argued that they are portrayed as submissive, passive

and as victims of cultural constraints. However we did find that participants not only resisted naming negative attitudes which could have implications for their identities, they also formulated positive identities for themselves and the women belonging to their communities. A number of identities for ethnic minority women emerged in the accounts analysed in this chapter. Ethnic minority women were presented as capable of doing a variety of work. Thus the women spoke of women in their family who were lawyers, doctors, consultants, teachers, freedom fighters and business women. In a number of extracts mothers, grandmothers, mother-in-laws and aunts were mentioned in constructing a tradition of working women within the family. This is very different to the much more popular conceptualisation of ethnic minority women (African women who are often presented in literature as dominant are an exception, see Essed , 1994 ) as subordinate. Further some of the common assumptions about why British-born Asian men marry and bring over wives from the Indian sub-continent is that it is a way of maintaining traditional cultural norms. Particularly because ethnic minority women in the West are said to be exposed to western influence of permissiveness and individualism (Ballard, 1990). However the participants' accounts do not present women back home as culturally restrained or traditional in the way it is usually presented in literature. The participants' accounts of family members and general descriptions of women in India and Pakistan suggests that women in these countries are working and independent. This contradicts the popular construction of the 'oriental female' as oppressed and in need of liberation. Moreover participants' accounts portrayed themselves as 'not submissive' (extract 7) but as capable, responsible (extract 8) and as one woman in extract 3 pointed out as having achieved a good position which merited recognition. Moreover some argued that they have contributed to change in attitudes of their communities towards working women. So instead of needing to be liberated by others these participants are portrayed as capable of their own liberation. So in this way from the accounts

the identities of ethnic minority women were constructed as independent, as pioneers and as capable of liberating themselves.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter began with looking at the attitudes of the different ethnic minority communities to working women. The theoretical review suggested that attitudes of the ethnic minority communities towards women working was not very encouraging. The participants' accounts did not portray 'an' (negative) attitude but rather constructed community attitudes flexibly. We argued that portraying community attitudes as not rigidly 'negative' was due to the implications to the participants identity. We also pointed out that even when community attitudes were formulated as slightly disapproving the participants were keen to make special cases for their families, themselves as exceptions. From the participants' accounts we suggested that less encouraging attitudes were always attributed as existing 'elsewhere'. In this way the common sense notion of 'an' (negative) attitude was maintained in the participants' discourse. Difficulties were formulated by drawing on issues which all communities could identify with, and that which could not be labelled as only a feature of their community,. Thus we observed that participants talked of difficulties with 'male dominance' and 'preferential treatment being given to males'. Finally we also argued that the participants in their accounting resisted the stereotypical formulations of ethnic minority women as 'passive and submissive' by portraying them as capable, independent and as having the ability to bring about changes.

## **CHAPTER 8**

# **THE CHANGING CONTEXT AND REFORMULATION OF IDENTITIES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this thesis we decided to use discourse analysis to understand identity by contrast to traditional approaches to studying identity. We argued that this would enable us to understand how identities are given meaning and are relevant to the participants in the current British context. We further argued that we should not only consider the participants' identity only in terms of their belonging to a particular ethnic group and practicing its culture but also that we should focus on their interaction with the outside environment. For this we considered their working lives. Moreover we looked at how their own culture and other cultures, particularly the host white culture shaped their working lives. Now having discussed these issues in the five analytical chapters we bring together some of the main themes we have identified throughout the thesis.

### **USEFULNESS OF THE METHODOLOGIES EMPLOYED IN THE STUDY**

In this study we argued that focus groups are a useful technique for interviewing ethnic minority women. However as pointed out earlier in Chapter 2, I was not able to conduct focus group interviews for the African married women in low status work and for most of the single women. In spite of the practical difficulties when focus groups were conducted, the group situation enabled participants to jointly work together and produce a variety of accounts. Participants worked flexibly with each others' versions. Sometimes others' versions challenged their own versions and at other times supported their own versions. For example in Chapter 3 participants worked with two bases for existing as a group. They finally managed to jointly produce an account which managed the negative implications which one of the specified basis for existing as a group carried. In this way lively debates were often

set up in the focus group interviews and the participants enjoyed the interaction. Focus group interviews also served certain pragmatic functions for the participants. Participants got to know members of their ethnic group. They were also able to identify and get practical help from their co-participants. Participants acknowledged the therapeutic value of coming together and talking about their belonging to the minority group and about their experiences of discrimination and so on. In the single interviews explicit challenges to the participants' views or versions were very occasional. Often it was the case of the interviewer persisting in her attempt to get an expected reply. However participants oriented to the ways by which their accounts could be undermined by competing versions and they modified their accounts to address these.

The analytical methodology had two strands. First we identified the various strategies used by the participants to address the interactional concerns. For example when participants in Chapter 7 did not want to name an (negative) attitude we found that they used a variety of strategies such as denial, portrayal of attitudes as flexible and varied, formulation of attitudes as not a problem anymore, portrayal of attitudes as a consequence of pragmatic concerns and also portrayal of their communities as having a positive attitude. Moreover these strategies were made up of a number of components. For example when participants spoke of varied attitudes the following components were identified in their accounts. Participants first formulated the attitudes of their communities as mild and varied, they argued that these attitudes were moreover restricted to certain people and certain situations, they then formulated their families as exceptions to the general case and finally portrayed their difficulties as a function of male dominance. Moreover we observed from our five analytical chapters that components and strategies were constructed in talk through use of a variety of conversation devices such as use of particular terms, extreme case formulations, three-part lists, contrasting structures, providing examples, providing



rich details, providing background information, using reported speech, 'it happened' device and so on.

The second strand in our analysis was the participants' orientation to the existence of certain discourses relevant to the society the participants lived in. Thus participants oriented to the discourse of discrimination as a feature of being a minority, they oriented to the discourse that they were restricted by cultural constraints and so on. Participants in their accounting while not fully subscribing to or being limited by these discourses drew on them flexibly to serve particular functions in their accounting. Moreover these discourses were maintained in our participants' accounts as specific to certain people and certain situations. So it was in this way that common sense understandings were maintained in our participants' accounting. However as we have earlier argued the form and shape that they took depended on the interactional context.

## **ISSUES OF REFLEXIVITY**

One of the issues, which we discussed in chapter 2, was how the cultural, religious and power differences between the interviewer and interviewees are considered as influencing the interview process. Researchers such as Bola *et. al.* (1998 ) argue that it is important for white researchers to be aware of the kinds of issues which their 'racialised identities' bring to the interview context. They argue that failure to do so suggests that the researcher is not being reflexive or self-critical enough. This argument can be extended to any researcher working with participants who are culturally or in terms of ability and so on different from themselves. This is an important issue and it does merit sufficient attention.

As we have discussed when outlining the analytical methodology participants orient to the kinds of discourses and meanings which are culturally available. So in other words participants in their accounting orient to the category entitlements which

the interviewer is expected to possess. In the same way the interviewer is also oriented to the kinds of category entitlements which the participants possess. So it is a two way process. However we do not assume that categories are fixed and that they affect the interview process in a particular way. We do not assume that the interviewer's Indian identification is a fixed thing and that it affects the African or Chinese participants or even the Indian participants in specific ways. Nor do we assume that difference is made relevant in every context.

As we had discussed in Chapter 2 we view reflexivity as something which participants themselves address as concerns in talk as per the interactional needs. We support this by drawing on the analytical findings of this thesis. We point out a situation where difference is made relevant and worked with in the participants accounting and a situation where participants from different ethnic groups orienting to the commonality of experience do very similar accounting.

We begin with considering extract 2 of Chapter 3. In this extract we find a situation where the interviewer's non-Muslim status is made relevant. One of the participants explicitly states that her community is the 'Muslim' community. Other participants in the group broaden the category label and state that their community is Asian. The other participants offer this explanation because they orient to the fact that the interviewer is non-Muslim and could feel excluded. That this is how the interviewer views the subsequent repair by the others is obvious from the interviewer's following turn. The interviewer tells the participants that she does not mind the first participant specifying her (the participant's) community as Muslim. This definitely suggests that the interviewer orients to the fact that the first participant's formulation of community excludes her. The first participant reassures the interviewer that it is precisely why she mentioned it in the first place. Her statement 'no no that's why I told you that' is her way of telling the interviewer that she had not allowed the interviewer's non-Muslim status to influence her response.

She reinforces this when she continues talking about her community as her group from Pakistan. She does not in her talk accept the category label Asian which had been offered by the other participants. It is after the second time that the first participant talks of community as those from Pakistan that the others offer shared characteristics as another basis for being a group. The first participant accepts it but still maintains her stress on religion by mentioning it as one of the shared characteristics. What the analytical findings suggest is that in the interactive context the issue of difference is brought up, worked with and then resolved. This is therefore how the participants themselves in their accounting deal with the question of reflexivity.

Further cultural differences and their assumed importance is also questioned by other analytical findings. In chapter 6 when an Indian and an African participant discussed discrimination very similar forms of accounting were noticed. Thus one Indian participant spoke of how her clients called her 'little Miss India' as a subtle way of discriminating. A similar concern was expressed by an African Nurse who says that her patients referred to her as the 'little black girl'. What we are suggesting is that in the British context what also becomes relevant for the participants from different cultures is the commonality of experience. It is the common experience of discrimination that they are expected to face, which is worked with in this interactive context. Therefore it is not appropriate to make assumptions about how the differences separate the ethnic groups. This is also brought out in the way that participants extended their boundaries and spoke of the white community as friends. That boundaries are flexible is also pointed out by Ang-Lygate (1996) a Chinese researcher working with Chinese participants. Ang-Lygate discusses that participants in her research constantly redrew their boundaries and defined 'otherness'. Ang-Lygate says that being 'Chinese' initially gained her entry to do research with a Hong Kong Chinese women's group. But she argues that Chineseness

as an imaginary boundary line that demarcated Otherness was only temporarily lifted to give her admission into the group. She adds that there were other imaginary boundary lines based on sexuality, class, religion and politics that were drawn by the group and accordingly she as a researcher was either included or excluded.

From the above discussion we conclude that difference and how it is resolved should be viewed as participants' concern in the interactive context rather than we ascribing meaning to difference and also assuming that it structures participants' lives in particular ways and that it influences the interview context in particular ways.

### **REFORMULATING DEFINITIONS - REDRAWING BOUNDARIES - COMMUNITY AND CULTURE**

Over the years the terms community has taken on different meanings. Traditionally community was described on the basis of physical-spatial characteristics. Here what individuals had in common was the geographical location such as town, village and so on. In these communities individuals were all closely related and had personal knowledge of each other. The notions of 'kinship' and 'family relationships' within the wider kinship network have currency and meaning in describing this type of community. With the advent of urbanisation other concepts of community made their entry.

In the urban settings the territorial notions of community were maintained to a certain extent, in terms of people belonging to a particular geographical area beginning to think of themselves as a community. However the composition of such communities was not necessarily based on kinship bonds or the type of relationships specified in the earlier societies. So what we find within these plural societies is that individuals begin to build their personal networks and form groups. Simultaneously within the urban settings also emerged groups which formed bonds on the basis of psychological affiliations such as ethnicity and religion. Fischer (1975, 1984) argues

that large-scale urbanisation promotes subcultural group formations. He argues that individuals collaborate with those who have like-minded interests and form distinctive religious, political, ethnic and other subcultural groups. Although those who form such communities may not have prior knowledge of each other when such individuals arrive in the cities they tend to aggregate in areas where members with whom they share linguistic and cultural commonalities live. In this way it is argued that communities are maintained within urban cities. Even if members of the same linguistic and cultural groups do not live in the same geographical location, a symbolic sense of community on the basis of religious or ethnic affiliations are said to exist for its members (Cohen, 1985). So in this sense all earlier formulations of community was focused on the drawing of boundaries. Moreover as Cohen points out, the basis for existing as a community always hinges on two things, one is that those belonging to the community share something in common and on this basis they are distinct from others. As Cohen (1985:12) points out the notion of community is relational and it supposes the opposition of one community to others. So while we talk of change in form and content of the communities what continues to persist in all these formulations of community is this notion of one group in relation to another. The concept of community and culture are also interrelated. Culture is usually defined as the values that members of a given group hold, the norms they follow and the material goods they create (Giddens, 1993:30). In other words culture is formulated as specific to a particular community. Culture in simple terms refers to the ways of life of the members of a society.

Notions of community in terms of ethnicity, religion and political groupings were identified in our participants' accounts. Participants also oriented to the idea that belonging to a community meant that they were supposed to have certain ways of behaving and living. Moreover our participants' accounting also maintained some continuity with traditional notions of community. Sometimes we found that



continuity was maintained in terms of 'form'. For example a number of our participants spoke of community as existing on the basis of 'shared characteristics'. Similarly participants discussed the territorial notions of community and argued that since the closeness and community feelings generated by such groups were not present in ethnic communities in Britain these could not be treated as genuine communities. Participants also constructed other versions of community such as community in terms of a loose network, community on the basis of interaction and so on. Similarly participants also defined their culture and aspects of their culture in many ways.

However in our participants' portrayal of community we found that there was a shift from the rigid drawing of boundaries. This is in contrast to earlier notions of community, where community was always considered as existing because of the drawing of well-defined boundaries between two groups. We found that our participants formulated boundaries for their own group/culture and made distinctions with other groups but in ways which downplayed the oppositional nature. Thus we discussed in chapter 3 that participants described members of the white community as 'friends'. Participants also spoke of belonging to a number of communities breaking down the notion of exclusivity. This is further supported by the participants' statements that finding meaning in their culture did not imply that they were not respecting or liking other cultures.

This feature of our participants' accounts can possibly be explained by considering the historical context of today. With the advent of globalisation we have found that the rigid maintenance of boundaries has begun to break down. Different cultures are interacting and working together on economic, scientific, financial and other fronts. We find that mass media and mass communication have connected individuals from different parts of the globe bringing with it the cultural and social awareness about other groups. For example there are computer firms in India who at

the end of their working day transfer their work through communication networks to their counterparts in another part of the globe, such as parts of the United States. In this way the concept of the 'global village' is becoming a reality. In such a climate maintenance of rigid boundaries and power differences begins to change. Simultaneously what is also happening is the breaking down of the stereotypical ideas held about other groups and finding a number of commonalities. The change is not through complete negation of the old but there is a movement. The result is that there is greater knowledge and greater contact with different cultures and groups. Further it is through discourse that notions of community and community boundaries are maintained and continued. Thus in our participants' accounts community boundaries are maintained in some way but are also extended by orienting to the kinds of historical and cultural changes. In this way the rigidity of community boundaries is broken down. We have earlier discussed the discursive reformulation of community in Potter and Reicher's (1987) analysis of the accounts of the Bristol riots in Britain. They have discussed that community was reformulated as per the needs of the interactional context. What we are arguing from our present study is that not only are the needs of the interactional context addressed but also that participants are orienting to the types of discourses which permeate their cultural milieu, in this case the breaking down of differences. However what we arguing for does not mean that the discourses of the cultural context are fixed. We are arguing that they exist in some form and that they are then made relevant and shaped in our participants' accounting.

## **CONSEQUENCES OF REFORMULATING BOUNDARIES**

Traditional theories portray the consequence of community boundary construction as providing members belonging to the particular groups, their identity. Although the social identity conferred by belonging to a community is not as rigid or imposing

as in the case of social groups (Cohen, 1985), giving individuals their identity is argued to be a function of belonging to a community. For members of minority groups such as ethnic minorities and religious minorities notions of power and the consequences of power relations are also brought into play through the notions of 'us' and 'them'. Thus minorities are argued as possessing particular identities, such as the possession of negative identities as suggested by Tajfel (1981) through comparing themselves with the dominant community. Further racist ideology is defined as subscribing to the understanding that people are socially categorised on the basis of their race and that each race is defined as having certain fixed biological and cultural characteristics. These characteristics result in negative identity for particular groups or are responsible for bringing into existence negative identities for other groups (see Hopkins *et.al.*, 1997, Miles, 1989). Potter and Wetherell (1987) using discourse analysis in their study of the attitudes of Pakeha (white) New Zealanders towards Polynesian immigrants have argued that such negative formulations about the minorities continue to exist. They further argue that such formulations are ways by which racist attitudes continue to be maintained. There has also been a history of ethnographic studies of minority ethnic communities to understand their identities. Again these focus on the cultural deficiency of the minorities. Moreover this type of dividing and defining minority and majority groups result in the minorities as being limited to a vulnerable position and are therefore portrayed as oppressed (Solomos 1989, Law 1996, Parmar 1982, Brah 1994, Afshar 1994). What we find is that the concept of dualism works to the advantage of the powerful group by maintaining of concepts of powerlessness and explaining the disadvantages of minorities in terms of their cultural deficiency (Ryan, 1971). However of late the cultural deficiency ideas, the inferiority concepts have been criticised and challenged because it is not seen as appropriate for the oppressor to define the identities of the oppressed (Husband, 1996, Bourne, 1980, Lawrence, 1982, Parmar, 1988).

Arguing against this type of comparative formulations of identity is the postmodern concept of valuing differences. Thus minorities are said to have their own cultural norms but without it being evaluated negatively. So here while minorities are still considered as different from the mainstream they are not seen as inferior or culturally deficient. However the postmodern ideas of valuing differences is also problematic. What we observe is that understanding ethnic minority community as distinct from the mainstream community simultaneously prevents them from being part of the mainstream. It shows them as incapable of relating to the mainstream white British community. Husband (1996:43) has argued that minority ethnic communities are routinely defined as being outside the national community. So highlighting the multicultural nature of British society while working towards eliminating the concept of a homogeneous Britain continues to present minorities as separate to the majority community. Hopkins *et. al.* (1997) discuss how formulations of what they term 'new racism' uses such ideas. They argue that 'new racism' does not see minorities as inferior but rather takes race as a 'natural and inevitable way of categorising people. They also point out that culture and cultural difference play a pivotal role in the 'new racism'. Because individuals' culture is inextricably linked with one's race it follows that the possibilities for people to take on other cultures is limited. What this means is that new racism's point of view is that minorities can never become part of the British society. Moreover although this type of racism does not explicitly state minorities as a problem the very fact that they are not integrating with the host population is portrayed as a problem for ideas of Nationhood. So in this way a portrayal of difference is also problematic. These ideas which are prevalent in common discourse are also strengthened by the nationality laws in Britain and other European countries. Phizacklea (1994) has discussed that in Germany the nationality law is highly restrictive. She says that here the German born children of immigrants are denied citizenship. So in this way



structurally also we find that ethnic minorities are being denied integration. Solomos (1989) similarly points out that notions of culture and nation are used to exclude those of different cultural, and ethnic backgrounds from the national collectivity. He give the following studies as examples: Barker, (1981), CCCS Race and Politics Group (1982), Reeves (1983), Miles and Phizacklea, (1984) and Gilroy, (1987). What this reminds us of is what Tajfel said in the 80's in his classic discussion of the social identity of minorities. Tajfel (1981) said that a minority group came into existence in a number of ways, one of which he named as the dominant community denying the minorities the right to become one among them. Solomos (1989) gives an example of how older Afro-Caribbeans tried to integrate and adapt into the host community but were met with rejection and racism. So the concept of difference whether in the original sense of superior and inferior or in the later postmodern sense of 'valuing differences' continues to prevent minorities from gaining equal status with the dominant community. So even though the concept of difference came into being countering the earlier concepts of minorities assimilating completely into the host community and losing their identity such as the 'melting pot hypothesis', we find that as a concept it has still got its own problems. As Blakemore and Boneham (1994:8) argue while ethnic differences are vital to understanding the lives of black people, it is important to avoid an image of ethnicity which suggests a self-contained source of identity or a property peculiar to ethnic minorities. They argue that the expression of difference should not be viewed as the minorities exhibiting peculiar traits. What we also find is that where it suits the dominant community the principles of universalism or a colour blind approach is used such as when it comes to service provision (see Connelly, 1989, Patel, 1990). As Patel (*op.cit.*, 1990) argues in terms of service provision black and white are treated exactly the same and it is assumed to be wrong to develop special approaches. So what we are arguing from this discussion is that concepts of difference and



integration are all used flexibly by the dominant group and that the concept of difference by itself is not sufficient to solve the problems minorities face. In fact as we pointed out the concept of difference also has its own set of problems. So how do we resolve the problems encountered with the concept of difference or what suggestions do we have to offer.

Our participants accounts provide us a way of addressing this situation. Because our participants blur the 'us' and 'them' boundaries what we find is that participants resist the exclusivity conferred on them. We also discussed how a number of the participants reformulated their communities to include white friends. It is in the participants' accounts that we find true multicultural Britain formulated and maintained. What we find in our participants' accounts is that difference is not standing in isolation. Differences are brought together as part of a larger whole. Thus in a symbolic way the participants are beginning to discursively construct themselves as belonging to a much broader community, simultaneously maintaining their ethnic identity in other ways such as in terms of an individual identity or a social identity which is not rigidly exclusive. This formulation also supports the kinds of discourse which has been currently espoused by the minorities in claiming their rights to citizenship and also seeing themselves as British. Our participants' accounts therefore provide us the way to understanding nationhood for a plural society.

The usefulness of recategorising and redrawing boundaries for better understanding and reducing prejudice between communities has been suggested by Gaertner, Dovidio *et. al.* (1989, 1993). They propose a theory known as the common ingroup identity model. They argue that when individuals belonging to different social groups come to view themselves as members of a single social entity, their attitudes toward former outgroup members become positive. This is supposed to further increase contact and interaction between group members further reducing

prejudice. However Baron and Byrne (1998) point out that just broadening the 'us' category is not sufficient for reducing prejudice. While these studies talk of actual states their understanding resonates with what we have observed in this study. At the level of interaction our participants' accounts are formulating communities to include not just individuals from their ethnic group but individuals from other groups. This can be argued as reducing feelings of prejudice. However the question which can be asked is, how can talk actually reduce prejudice, particularly since it is 'only talk'. Moreover the added query is that since this discourse is produced by the minorities how will it really change the attitudes of the majorities or the structural inequalities. We can argue that this can still reduce prejudice. From a discourse analytical perspective prejudice, racist attitudes are understood as being maintained discursively in participants' talk (for examples see Wetherell and Potter, 1992, Hopkins *et. al.* 1997). In Chapter 4 we observed from the analysis of our participants' accounts that ethnic minorities also formulate prejudiced attitudes towards the white communities. So if racist attitudes are maintained and perpetuated through discourse then by the same principle other discourses can also gain currency. Thus the discursive construction of broader communities, which includes white people, by the participants suggests a possible way of countering prejudice at the level of discourse. As such understandings become more common in everyday discourse we can argue that it could weaken the discursive formulations of prejudice based on the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy. It would also work towards bringing about an understanding that the minorities are truly a part of the British Society of today.

## **REFORMULATING IDENTITIES**

Sacks (1974) work on membership category devices has been discussed and also empirically studied by a number of researchers such as Watson (1976, 1978), Jayyusi (1984), Drew (1978), Day (1998), Edwards (1998) and so on. Sacks was

concerned with how participants use descriptive categories to perform various discursive actions. Moreover mentioning a category also brings into play the characteristics or features associated with that category. On the other hand someone who is attributed as having particular features is also then treated as a member of the category with which those features are associated (see Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998:4) Further those belonging to a particular category are also formulated as being knowledgeable about particular things. This is frequently referred to as category entitlement (see Potter 1996). Thus a doctor is entitled to knowing something about illness. So in this way specifying a category immediately brings into focus a number of related issues.

In the case of ethnic minority women, specifying that they belong to a particular ethnic, religious or political group immediately made relevant the kinds of characteristics associated with that group. Thus when participants talked of a religious community the connotations was that they did not want to relate to others and belonging to the Asian communities brought into play the stereotypical connotations associated with the category 'Asian female'. Moreover belonging to the minority group itself suggested that they had to endure certain behaviour from others. Thus discrimination was considered to a feature of their lives. Also there were other assumptions about the way minority communities behaved towards their women, namely that they imposed a number of constraints on them. What we also observe is most of these assumed characteristics or features of belonging to an ethnic minority group are negative. The participants in their accounting oriented to what could be assumed about them and about their communities. They not only oriented to these assumptions but as we observed in our analysis the participants resisted what could be assumed about their lives. Thus we observed in Chapter 6 that participants discounted discrimination as a necessary consequence of being an ethnic minority. We discussed how participants denied discriminatory experience or downplayed the

significance of discrimination. When attitudes of the communities were portrayed, participants did not portray them as negative *per se* to women working. The attitudes were portrayed flexibly and in mild ways. Even after such portrayal we observed that the participants went on to formulate their immediate families or communities as exceptions to what is generally assumed to be the case. Moreover in Chapter 4 we found that participants when formulating the meanings of culture contrasted them with other understandings and through the contrast made relevant what meaning was appropriate. What we observe in our participants' accounts is resistance to being ascribed certain identities and assuming of meaning by others.

Simultaneously our participants created alternate identities for themselves and their communities. We discussed how ethnic minority women were portrayed in the participants' accounts as capable, achievers and as doing a variety work. This portrayal is very different to what is usually ascribed to ethnic minority women, namely passive and submissive. Participants in their accounts pointed out that there was change in the characteristics of ethnic minority women. Generally going out to work can be seen as social mobility for the women. However in the case of ethnic minority women going out to work is still considered as influenced and restricted by their families and communities. Participants oriented to this also. While they spoke of the different influences, constraints and hardships they had to face in deciding to work the participants did not portray themselves as limited by them. What we observed from the analysis was that the participants' portrayed difficulties but then went on to discuss that they overcame the hardship or made choices. Even when having a choice was questioned participants still managed to account that they did have choice. What we also observed was that participants were not reluctant to talk of difficulties as limiting them when they were applicable to other cultures also. Thus participants spoke of 'male dominance' and 'male preference' as affecting their lives and the lives of other women in their families. These issues are formulated in

lay discourses as affecting the lives of women in general hence refrain from pathologising one community. We therefore found that participants when downplaying ideas of their communities as unsupportive to women working were ready to speak of difficulties on the basis of gender discrimination. Some of the accounts we analysed in Chapter 6 also support the idea. We discussed that participants labelled the discrimination they faced as a consequence of their gender or stature but not racial discrimination.

### **MAINTAINING 'COMMON SENSE' NOTIONS**

In the last section we argued that participants resisted what could be assumed about their lives. We argued therefore that participants' accounts discounted discrimination as a necessary consequence of being a minority. We also argued that participants also downplayed their communities as espousing negative attitudes towards working women. However there are important consequences for such types of accounting. They can be argued to overlook the structural inequalities that minority communities face. One of the main criticisms which has been made about the ethnomethodological variety of discourse analysis is its indiscriminate acceptance of all types of accounting. For example accepting the participants' accounts that there is no discrimination can mean that the conditions of minorities have changed and there is no need for any further measures to be taken to counter discrimination. This criticism can be countered by going back to one of the main tenets of discourse analysis. Discourse analysis does not treat what participants say as a portrayal of something internal, rather discourse considers why particular actions are made relevant in talk and to what purpose. Going back to our example the discounting of discriminatory experiences was to point out that it was not a necessary feature of being a minority. So here the function was specific. Moreover in their accounting participants themselves oriented to the understanding that a total negation of



discrimination was not appropriate. Thus our participants' accounts of denial of personal experiences of discrimination, their accounts of denying people close to them as being unsupportive of women working were always accompanied by formulations that discrimination, unsupportive attitudes were the feature of particular others' lives and particular situations. It was in this way that 'common sense notions' were maintained in our participants accounts. The maintenance of such discourses is argued to be a way by which minorities themselves at the level of talk continue to make relevant the existence of structural inequalities. Simultaneously it addresses that racism does not exist in just one form or does not manifest in all situations. One of the criticisms against the anti-racist approaches and multicultural approaches is their inability to comprehend that racism is not just one thing but keeps changing. Our participants accounts further affirm that the flexible nature of discrimination has to be taken into consideration when efforts are made to address structural inequalities.

What we also observe from our participants accounting is how these 'common sense notions' are formulated at the interactional level and how this then further contributes to the existence of common sense discourses in everyday talk. There is a kind of cyclic movement between the way common sense notions are brought into the interactive context, worked with as per the interactional needs of the situation and are then become part of the everyday lay understanding. The form and content of the understanding is changed in some ways but is maintained in other ways giving a sense of continuity. An example is the maintenance of community in the integrating sense in our participants accounts. Participants maintained community as existing on the basis of shared characteristics but in ways which did not have negative implications for their identity. Such maintenance of common sense notions is also what contributes to the continuation of a sense of history for the participants and it is also in this way a continuity of the notion of identity is

maintained. Similarly we also observed in our participants accounts of their discussion of culture that continuity was maintained by portraying that the form or content of the cultural symbol was unchanged. At the same time if one was kept unchanged the other could be changed to manage the potential implications of such accounting. Thus if form was kept unchanged, content could be changed to manage the negative inferences which accompanied that particular form. In this way the meanings which were considered as relevant by the participants could be made available.

## **CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD**

In chapter 1 from our discussion of how traditional theories were used to understand minority identity we identified three gaps. First we said that the traditional approaches do not consider the meanings that ethnic minority women themselves give to their communities, culture, work and so on. Second, we argued that there was an overemphasis on ethnicity. Third, we argued that the dualistic manner by which minority identity is understood only as a consequence of its relationship to the dominant community is inadequate. We therefore argued that discourse analysis which enables us to understand the discursive construction of identities was a useful alternative method to use to address these gaps. Having now brought together the themes identified in our study we can say that the methodology has provided a way of addressing the gaps. From our participants' accounts we identified new meanings and ways of understanding community, culture and their experiences of being an ethnic minority person. We found that our participants worked with the assumed and given meanings and formulated how they wanted their culture, community and influences on their lives from both the minority and dominant community to be understood. Further our participants' accounts oriented to the ways by which ethnicity was assumed to be an important feature of all aspects of their lives and we

found that they discounted its relevance in certain contexts. Finally we have elaborately discussed how the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy and the consequences of such dichotomy were formulated in the participants' accounts . We argued that the participants' formulations negated some of the traditional ways by which the two groups were considered as mutually exclusive. We discussed that participants saw themselves very much part and connected members of the British Society. This highlights how reformulation of the identities of ethnic minority women in response to the changing context is an ongoing process. This suggests that the way forward is not just focusing on how different ethnic minority women are from others but also to begin to consider how they themselves formulate their belonging to British society and see themselves as citizens of Britain.

## APPENDIX

### TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOLS

.	A full stop indicates a stopping fall in tone. It does not necessarily mean the end of a sentence.
,	A comma indicates a continuing intonation.
?	A question mark indicates a rising inflection. It does not necessarily indicate a question.
(.3)	The number in brackets indicates a time gap in tenths of a second.
(.)	A dot enclosed in brackets indicates a pause in the talk of less than two-tenths of a second.
(( ))	A description enclosed in a double bracket indicates a non-verbal activity. For example ((banging sound))
-	A dash indicates the sharp cut-off of the prior word or sound.
:	Colons indicate that the speaker has stretched the preceding sound or letter. The more colons the greater the extent of the stretching.
( )	Empty parentheses indicate the presence of an unclear fragment on the tape.
.hh	A dot before an 'h' indicates speaker in-breath. The more the 'h's the longer the outbreath.
=	The 'equals' sign indicates contiguous utterances.

The transcription symbols used in this study are those developed by Jefferson (1985).

**FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS**  
**SESSION ONE**  
**TOPIC: WORK**  
**TIME : 2 HOURS**

[To participants -Thanks and appreciation for being there]

**Introduction:** What we are going to do today is to discuss about the work you do and what it means to you. I'm interested to hear your views as well as the views of family and community members. The discussion will be confidential. I hope none of you mind it being recorded. While writing up anonymity will be maintained. Any details which can identify the person will be changed.

Please feel free to share your views and to voice your opinions. Please feel free to talk to each other and to discuss with each other. I'm interested to hear what each of you has to say . The purpose of the discussion is not to find right or wrong answers. Everyone's view is important and I'm interested to hear different responses.

**SECTION I -MEANINGS AND IMPORTANCE OF WORK: 1 hour and 10 MIN**

O.k now that the practical stuff is over could you introduce yourselves and say what job you do.

[ The group will sit around a table with recording equipment in the centre]

**1. Choice**

1. When you first started working why did you decide to get a job?

**Probe**

**Was it your decision to work?**

**Did family members encourage you to work?**

2. Is work important to you?

**2. Work and Change**

1. Do you think work has changed your life?

2. In what ways?

3. Do you think it is a good or bad thing?

4. Why?



### **3. Advantages and disadvantages**

1. What are the advantages of working for you? (Some will be covered in section 2 )

#### **Probes**

**Is it worth financially?**

**Do you think it has changed things for you at home?**

**In what ways?**

**Do you think these changes are good or bad?**

**Why?**

2. Are there any disadvantages of working? ( some may be covered earlier then move to probes)

#### **Probes**

**Does working make it difficult to find time for yourself?**

**Does it leave you less time to do things you might want to do, such as pursue an interest/hobby/study?**

**Do you think work affects your family life?**

**Probe: such as, time you spend with your children?**

3. Would you prefer not to work?

### **4.Relationships at work**

1. Do you have friends at work?

2. Who are they?

3.Do you do things with them outside work?

4.What things do you do with them?

5.Is it important to have friends at work?

6. Do you think family members approve or disapprove of these friendships?

### **5. Aspiration and Career**

1.Do you like your present job?

(If yes) Why do you like your job?

2. (If no) Why don't you like your job?

What would you ideally like to do? Why?

## **SECTION II - ATTITUDES TO WOMEN WHO WORK : 30 MIN**

### **1.Family**

1. Do family members offer you support?
2. Who gives you most support?
3. In what ways do they offer you support?

#### **Probes**

**Do family members take care of the children**

**Do they help you with the chores?**

4. Is there anyone who is unsupportive?
5. Can you say something more about it?

#### **Probes**

**Do they think work has changed you?**

**In what ways?**

**Do they think you have less time for the home?**

6. Do family members encourage you to go further in your work?
7. (If yes) Who gives you most encouragement?
8. In What ways do they encourage you?
9. Is there anyone who discourages you?
10. Can you say more about it?

### **2. Community**

Next I would like to discuss with you the attitudes of the community. Before I do that can you tell me

1. Who would you consider as your community?
2. To what extent is being part of the community important to you?
3. Why? or Why not?
4. In general do members of the community approve or disapprove the idea of women going to work?
5. Why?
6. Are their views important to you?

Finally I would like to focus on the kinds of prejudice you face at work, the

assumptions made because of your ethnic origin or because you are a woman.

### **SECTION III - DISCRIMINATION: 20 MIN**

1. Do you think women at work face kinds of discrimination?
2. What are they?
3. Have you personally experienced prejudice or discrimination?
4. From whom?

#### **Probe**

**Has anyone shown prejudice because of your colour, dress, language etc.**

5. Did you do anything about it?
6. Why or Why not?
7. What did you do?
7. Do you know of anyone who has experienced discrimination?

**Any questions that you would like to ask? (extra 10min)**

**Thank and fix time for next session.**

**SESSION TWO**  
**CULTURAL SYMBOLS AND PRACTICES**  
**TIME : 2 HOURS**

[Welcome and appreciation for participating]

In today's session we will be discussing culture. The first part of the discussion will focus on different aspects of culture such as language, food, dress, marriage, religion and what it means to you and how you practice them if at all. I'm also interested to hear about the ways in which you teach them to your children if at all.

**SECTION I: MEANINGS OF CULTURAL SYMBOLS AND PRACTICES FOR THE WOMEN - 1 HOUR**

**1. Selecting Aspects of Culture**

1. Are there any .....(Indian, Pakistani, Chinese, African) customs or aspects of culture you think are important to follow?

**Probe**

**Are there any customs or aspects of culture which you would not give up?**

2. What are they?

Can we discuss them one at a time ( I would then start looking at those aspects of culture which the group has considered important and then discuss others)

**2. Language**

1. What is your mother tongue?

2. How much if at all do you speak ....(Hindi, Urdu, Chinese, Swahili etc)?

**Probe**

**To whom do you speak?**

3. How important is keeping it to you? and Why?

4. Apart from English and ....(Hindi, Chinese etc) do you use any other language regularly?

**Probe**

**What are they?**

5. How important are those to you? and Why?

**3. Marriage**

1. Did you have a traditional wedding?

**Probe**

**Are there particular aspects of traditional marriage practices or ceremonies which are important to you?**

2. Do you think traditional marriage practices or ceremonies will be less important in the future?

**Probe**  
**Why or Why not?**

3. Would you say that members of your community follow traditional ways of getting married?

**Probe**  
**Have things changed?**

4. I would like to hear your views on mixed marriages? What would you say are the advantages of mixed marriages?

5. Do you think mixed marriages make it easier to be part of the white community?

**Probe**  
**easier to get accepted into the white community?**

6. Are there any disadvantages?

Follow up: Can you say something more about it?

7. If your children or someone close to you wanted to have a mixed marriage would you encourage them?

#### **4. Religion**

1. Do you follow any religion?

**Probe**  
**Which religion do you follow?**

2. Do you actively practice .....(Hinduism, Sikhism etc)?

**Probe**  
**In what ways for example by saying prayers, going to temple, mosque etc.**

3. Do you think it is important to practice religion?

**Probe**  
**Why or why not?**

4. Is being a .....(Muslim, Sikh, Hindu) important to you?

5. (If answer is no to Q. 1) Can you say something more?



6. Do others in the family think it is important to practice .....(Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism etc.)?

**Probe**

**Why or Why not?**

### **5.Food**

1. Do you usually eat .....(I, P, C, A) food, British food or convenience food?

2. Ideally would you want to eat.....(I,P,C,A) food more often than British food?

3. Do you think it is important to eat .....(IPCA) food more often?

**Probe**

**Why or why not?**

**Do you have pressure to cook other foods?**

4. Do you or you family eat .... (I, P, C, A) food for special occasions? (festivals, marriage, after child birth etc.)

5. Do you think it is important to maintain the skills of cooking traditional food?

6. Would you teach your children?

While we are discussing food I would like to hear your views on religious or cultural restrictions on food

7.Do you think it is important to follow religious or cultural restrictions on food?

**Probe**

**Why or Why not?**

**Do you follow them?**

### **6. Dress**

1. Do you wear ..... (I, P, C, A) clothes or British clothes ?

2.When and where do you wear traditional clothes ?

**Probe**

**for example at home**

3. Do you like to wearing traditional clothes ?

## **SECTION II : EXPLORING CULTURE - 20 MIN**

### **Being .....Indian, Chinese, African or Pakistani**

1. Have you tried to learn more about your culture?
2. What did you do ?

#### **Probe**

**Why did you do it?**

**Did becoming older or mature have anything to do with it?**

3. Would you say you have gained something by doing this?
4. Are there times when you are more aware of being an ....(I, PCA)? When?

#### **Probe**

**Are you more aware of being an .....(I,P,C,A) when you are with others from your community?**

**Are you aware of being an .....(I,P,C,A) when someone says something negative about ...(I,P,C,A)?**

5. Can you say something about it?

### **British Culture**

1. Have you ever felt more British than.....(I,P,C,A)?

**Rephrase: Did you ever choose to follow British customs or culture instead of your own?**

#### **Probe**

**When? and Why?**

2. Can you tell me something more about it?
3. How did members of your family respond?
4. What were the reactions of others in the community?

## **SECTION III: POSSIBLE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE MEANING OF CULTURE FOR YOU - 20 MIN**

### **1. Developmental changes**

1. So would you say that your attitudes to culture and ethnicity has changed as you grew up?
2. In what ways?

3. Why do you think they have changed?
4. Would you say that particular things influenced the change?

**Probes**

**Influence of friends**

**Have your friends influenced the way you feel about being an .....(I,C,P,A)?**

**Have they changed your attitude towards your religion, marriage, values etc.**

**Media To what extent would you say media has influenced your attitude to your culture?**

**Work**

**Do you think work has influenced the way you see your culture?**

**Have work colleagues shown interest in your culture?**

**In what ways?**

**If no , Why not?**

**SECTION IV: PRESERVING CULTURE - 10 MIN**

1. Is it important to preserve culture?
- 2.If yes, are some aspects more important than others?
3. What are the ways in which you manage to preserve your culture?

**Probe**

**Can you say something more?**

4. Do others in the family think it is important to preserve culture?

**Probe**

**In what ways do they do it?**

5. Do members of the community think it is important to preserve culture?

**SECTION V: PASSING ON CULTURE - 10 MIN**

1. Do you think it is important to teach your children your culture?
- 2.Who would you say has most responsibility for teaching the children?
3. In what ways do you or others teach the children?
- 4.Do you think work stops you from teaching your children as much as you would like to?

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